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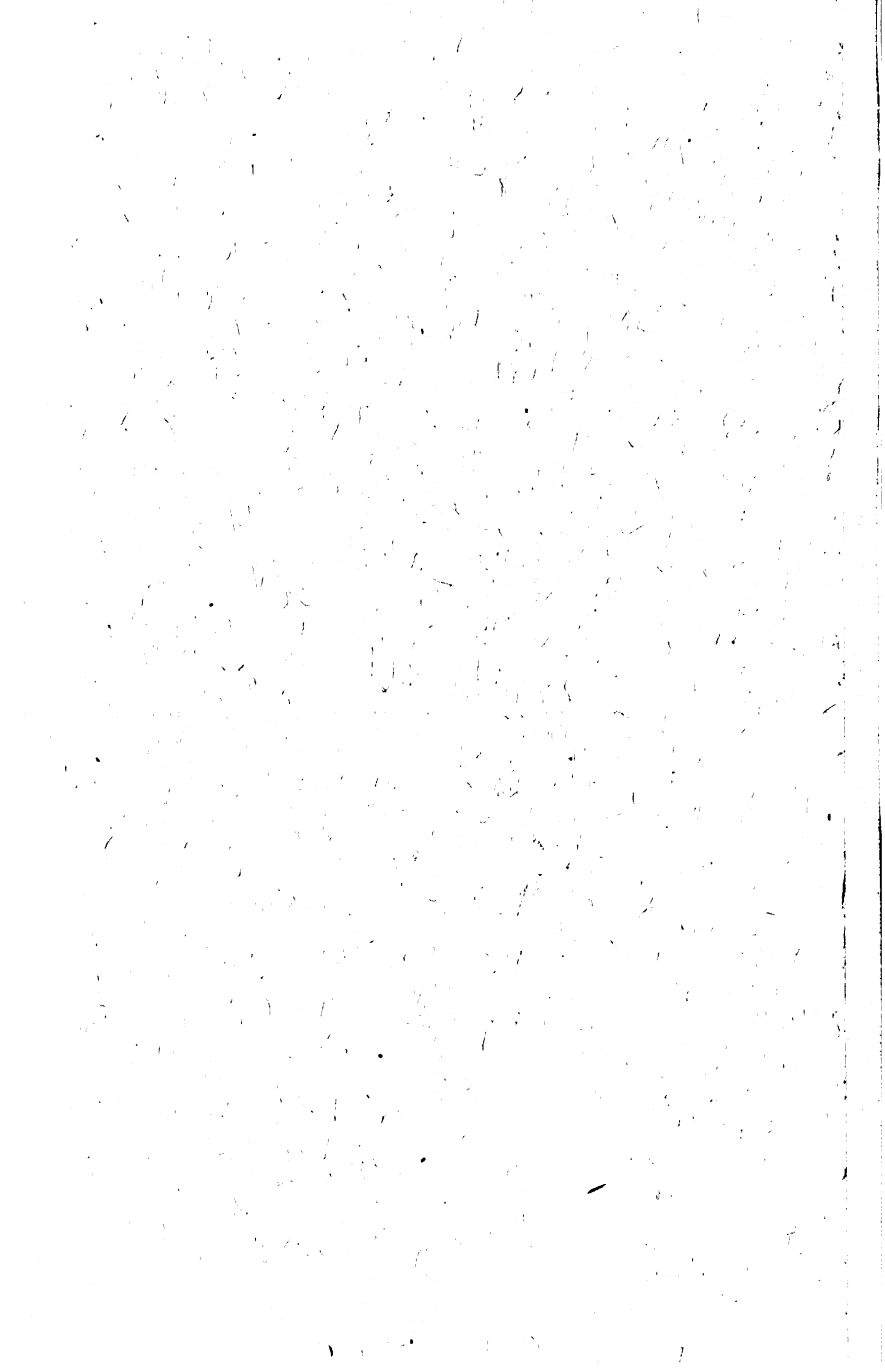
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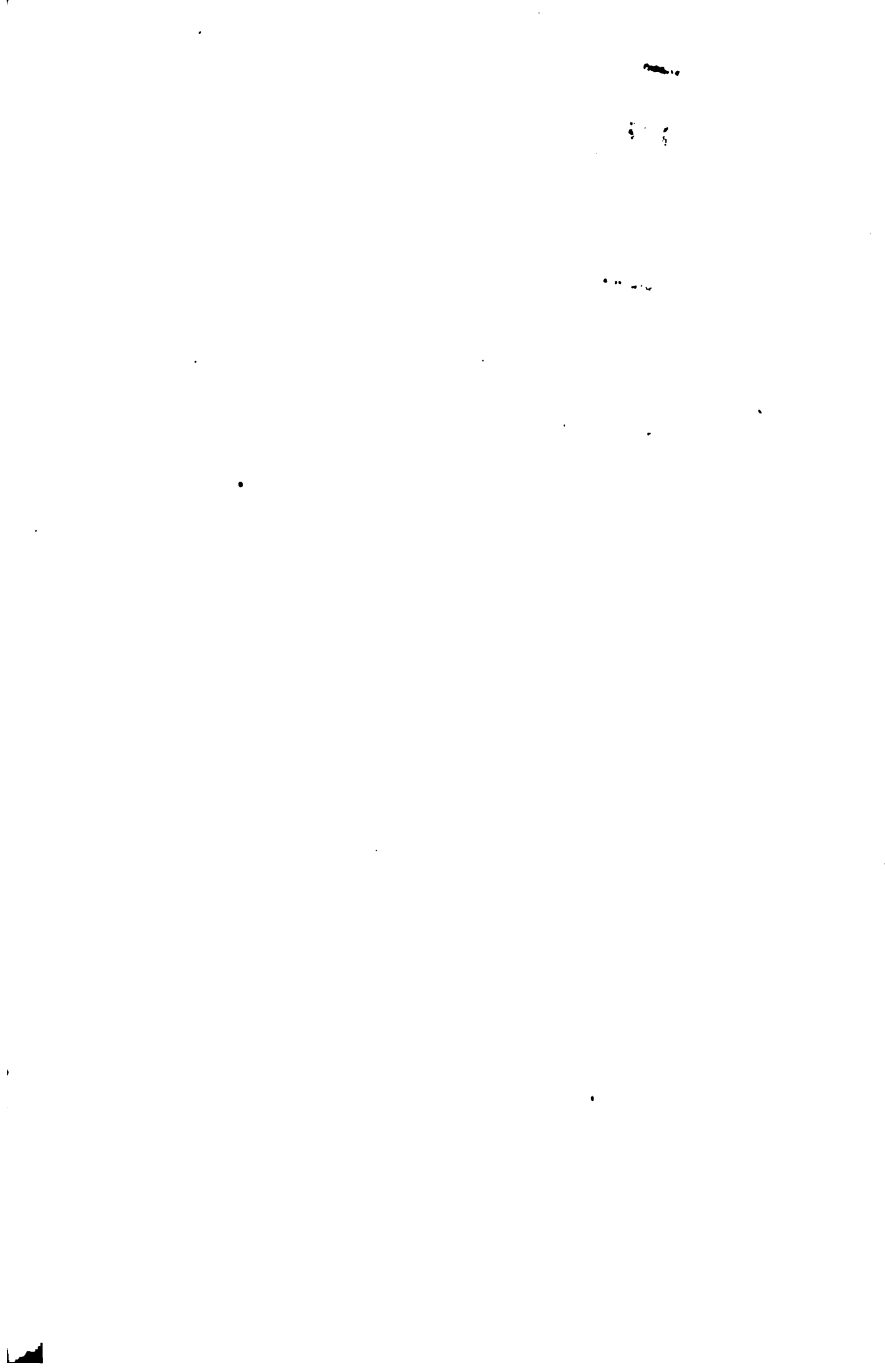
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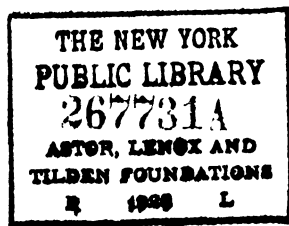
CONVICT B14

A NOVEL

BY
R. K. WEEKES



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MADE IN U. S. A.

TO
LÆTITIA JANE GARDINER
WITH APOLOGIES

26 X 33 22



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CONVICT B14

CHAPTER I

JANUA VITÆ

When men shall say, Peace, and all things are safe, then shall sudden destruction come upon them, as sorrow cometh upon a woman travailing with child, and they shall not escape.

AT the entrance of a green valley, where the Easedale beck came down from Easedale Tarn, scattering its silver tresses loose over the rocks at Sour Milk Gill, and hurrying to join the Rotha at Goody Bridge, stood a wayside hostelry: a spruce gray villa, overflowing with flowers under white and green sun-blinds and a glass piazza. Not by any means a grand place, but attractive; the hesitating traveler might guess that the comforts inside would answer to the trimness outside, nor would he be wrong. Within its limits, the Easedale Hotel was that rarity, a thoroughly well-run English inn.

The proprietor of the place and only begetter of its prosperity was reposing on the veranda in an easy attitude, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the Grasmere road. Spidering, he called it; which meant that he was looking out for possible guests. He liked to make a play of his work. Harry Gardiner, the son of a country parson, was a slight young man of middle height, and very brown — olive-brown, sun-brown. He did not look wholly English; a quarter part of Spanish blood ran in his veins. He had dark eyes and a small head, small hands and wiry muscles, small features and a thin mouth. He was quick in all he thought and said and did, shrewd at a bargain, fond of

money, but fonder still of liberty. After being pitchforked by circumstances into his odd trade, he had stuck to it for love and made it pay; he had already progressed from a humble *fonda* in the Canaries to a boarding-house in Sydney, and from the boarding-house to the Easedale Hotel. But he was a rolling stone, and would never stay long enough in any one place to reap the full fruit of his toil.

He turned at the sound of a step behind him, and his eyes laughed.

"Hullo, Denis! Got into all your glad rags? You'll scare my people — they aren't used to such visions."

"You'd not have me sit down to dinner without washin' my hands, would you?" inquired the new-comer in a voice which his best efforts could never rid of a trace of soft Irish brogue. He was wearing ordinary evening clothes, not very new, but in some subtle way he did contrive to give the impression of being *point device* in every detail. Denis Merion-Smith was partner in an aeroplane firm; but he had once been in the Royal Engineers, and though it was years since he had resigned his commission, he still carried his handsome nose in the air and looked down on inferior mortals through a single eyeglass.

Gardiner laughed. "Why not? My crowd mostly do. But we're going up in the social scale. I began with travelers, I went on to artists, I've attained the Church, and I live in hopes of even rising to the army some day. You didn't happen to look into the dining-room on your way down?"

"I did not."

"I wasn't suggesting that you were nosing out the dinner," Gardiner explained. "I thought you might have noticed the flowers. They're rather special. I did 'em myself. That's the way to work it. Ginger up the servants all round, and add flowers to choice. Sweet-peas I recommend for the table, blue lobelia and pink geranium for window-boxes. The English tourist can't resist window-boxes. I could write the innkeeper's vademecum. It's a great game."

"I can't think how you do it!" said Denis in disgust.

"I can't think how you ever took it on! Kotowing to all these beastly people and licking their boots —"

"No, no. The boy does that — spits on them, anyhow. We can't all be in the Sappers, Denis." Denis snorted. "My trade suits me all right, though it wouldn't you," said Gardiner more seriously. "I like it, you know I like taking over a disreputable pigsty of a place like this was, and turning it out in a couple of years blooming like the rose. This Easedale's quite a decent little pub now. I shall be half sorry to leave it."

Denis paused, with a lighted match in his hand. "You're never thinking of givin' it up?"

"I've already done so."

"You've given up the Easedale?"

"*Así es, señor.* The place is sold, and I clear out in October."

"Well!" said Denis, after a vain struggle with the householder's distrust of the nomad, "you know your own business, I suppose; but I should have thought this was good enough for you. Are you never goin' to settle down?"

"You're so beastly impatient!" said Gardiner, with a laugh. He waited to light a cigarette, cherishing it between his palms, and then jerking the match with a quick gesture across the road. "I've been searching for my ideal; you wouldn't have me hurry over that, would you? I've tried the Canaries, and I've tried Austrylie, and I've tried England, and they're all vanity and vexation of spirit. But I think I've got the real thing at last."

"Where?"

"On the Semois. You never heard of it? Quite. Nobody has. The Semois is a river, a ravishing river who ties herself into complicated knots round forest-covered mountains. On the map she looks like a bedivvled corkscrew. I don't know where the charm lies — I've seen fifty places more conventionally beautiful, but I tell you, Denis, I've got that river in my bones! Figure to yourself a young mountain, with the river plumb before it, in a gorge. You look

down into that gorge, and beyond it over the tops of hills and hills *and* hills, range behind range, getting bluer, and dimmer, and blurrier, till they're a mere wash of cobalt against the sky —"

"Hills —!" said Denis. "I've asked you: where is this place?"

"The Ardennes. Belgian Luxemburg. Close to the French frontier and twenty miles from Sedan."

"Well, I suppose you know your own business best," said Denis for the second time — it was plain he supposed nothing of the kind — "but I'd not settle there if you paid me."

"Why on earth not? Oh ah, of course! the German menace, isn't it? Well, if they come, I shall suffer with my adopted country, that's all."

"If you'd spent a year in Germany, as I have, and seen what I did, you'd not laugh," said Denis, patiently and obstinately. The German danger was one of his hobbies. It was surprising that, with so many hoary prejudices, he should ever have taken up with a new-fangled science like aeronautics; but who is consistent?

"I'm not laughing, my dear chap. You know more about it than I do, and if you say it's on the cards I believe you. But they're not coming to-day, are they? and *mañana es otro día*. Meanwhile I go ahead with my Bellevue (that's to be the name of it: beautifully banal, what?) and trust to luck. It hasn't served me badly so far. Besides, I don't stand to lose much. I like money all right, but I'm not a slave to that or anything else. If I lose every penny to-morrow I shouldn't put myself about — except for daddy's sake; and after all he's not actually dependent on me, I only supply the amenities. Yes; bar accidents, I can pretty well defy Fate."

He stretched himself complacently, as if rejoicing in his freedom. Denis preserved silence.

"I suppose you wouldn't say a thing like that?" asked Gardiner, looking at him curiously.

"I would not."

"Irishman!"

"I hate boastin'," said Denis shortly.

"I thought you believed in an overruling Providence, which orders everything for us from the cradle to the grave?"

"It's not incompatible. And I wish you'd settle down," said Denis, who was a person of few and simple ideas.

"Well, if you're good perhaps I will."

"But not in Belgium, Harry! Belgium's such a rotten hole. And the people are half dagoes. Why can't you be content with England?"

Gardiner laughed. "Because I ain't English, old son — nor Irish neither. I'm a bit of a dago myself, for that matter. B' the powers, here's a car coming! You sit tight now, and see me do the fascinating landlord."

The car, an expensive touring model, drew up at the gate. The driver was a big man with dark gray eyes, regular features and a dark mustache. It was a handsome head, but not wholly pleasant; in the accepted phrase, he had evidently lived hard. Denis with unerring fastidiousness put him down as a bounder. Beside him sat a lady, muffled up in a long dust-cloak and a veil, and there was a maid behind.

"How far on is it to Keswick?" asked the driver, leaning out to address Gardiner with careless incivility.

"Nine miles."

"Nine, eh? Are you the proprietor of this place?" He looked the young man up and down with cursory interest. "Well, we may want rooms for the night. Can you do us?"

"The house is rather full, but I can show you what I have."

"What do you say, Dot? We can't get on to Keswick to-night on this confounded tire. Might as well stop, do you think? Of course it's a wretched little hole, but we haven't much choice." The aside was wholly audible both to Gardiner and to Denis.

"I don't care, provided it's clean," said the girl. Her

features were invisible behind her veil, but the voice sounded young.

"What? Oh yes, I should say it's fairly clean. Yes, we'll stay," he added, turning to the owner of the fairly clean hotel. "No, never mind the rooms, we'll have dinner at once. Here, and send some one round to see after my car, will you? That tire's punctured."

"Very good, sir," said Gardiner, standing aside for the lady to pass in. Her husband followed, and they were lost to view. Denis remained fuming on the veranda. It was one thing to put on airs himself, another to see them on somebody else. Besides, Denis was always scrupulously courteous to inferiors; he considered it bad form to hit a man who was debarred from hitting back. He hoped the new-comers would not stay; but time passed, and nobody appeared except a man to take the Rolls-Royce to the garage; and presently the gong sounded, and Denis went in.

At the back of the hotel two wings jutted out from the main block, forming three sides of a quadrangle; and in the right wing, just at the corner, Gardiner had his den. It looked, of course, directly across the garden into the windows opposite, but the house did not shut out all the view. Sitting sideways, one could see the broad green vale running westwards and narrowing swiftly to a gorge, down which the stream tumbled, white as milk. Dark gray the hills were, slate-gray, almost purple, with emerald verdure worn thin in places and showing the naked rock—Helm Crag, Seat Sandal, Dollywagon Pike, St. Sunday Crag, Silver How, what names of romance! A sweet and pleasant scene, in this summer twilight; mists upstealing along the brook, and a half-transparent moon sharpening into silver as she sank into the lemon-colored west. When the sounds of the house for a moment lulled, one could hear the murmur of the cascade which seemed to hang motionless against the rock, flattened out like a skein of white wool.

The room was small; it had a big window in the left wall, a fireplace opposite, and a table between, on which stood a packing-case in a litter of straw. Gardiner had

been opening a case of whisky for Denis, who liked to fancy himself a connoisseur.

"Do you trot round after everybiddy as you did with those people to-night?" he asked gloomily. Dinner had passed since the scene on the terrace, but it had not buried his resentment.

"Not as a rule I don't. Miss Marvin, my housekeeper, who's a real treasure, she's supposed to see to visitors. But I do it when I want to. Is it the Trents rankling still? I rather enjoyed them."

"Is his name Trent?"

"His name is Trent. Major Trent, D.S.O., and wife, of Thurlow Park, Surrey; he inscribed it in the visitors' book. That's him you hear overhead; they dined upstairs. I've had to put them in the old part of the house, every other corner is full. I don't know what'll happen when he sees his bedroom."

"A line regiment, of course," said Denis, gloomily scornful. "No decent corps would stand him. I wish you'd kick him out."

"That, my young friend, is not the spirit in which one runs a successful hotel. Do you know he's paying me upwards of three guineas a day? Besides, he didn't mean to be rude, he was simply talking over my head. What am I to him? The landlord of a third-rate inn. I'd give myself airs too if I had a place in Surrey and a 1912 Rolls-Royce."

"Insufferable bounder!" said Denis. Gardiner laughed.

"No, no; that he's not. Rather a fine head—a good man gone wrong. Oddly enough, I believe Tom knew him in India. If it's the same man, he got his D.S.O. in South Africa, a very gallant piece of work, and then had to send in his papers because of some row about a woman—a subaltern's wife, to make things pleasant all round. Tom rather liked him, bar his little weakness for the sex. But he must have come into money since—through his wife, I wouldn't mind betting, and that's why he's so civil to her. For he's the sort who's usually more civil to other people's wives."

"I can't think how you can bring yourself to speak to him!" said Denis. He was one of those who find it hard to understand how others can act differently from themselves. Gardiner laughed more than ever.

"We can't all be idealists, my good Denis. I've my bread and butter to earn. I had all my fine feelings knocked out of me long ago. Yes, Miss Marvin, what is it?"

Miss Marvin, a comely, capable woman of forty, seemed a little flustered.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, sir, but it's the gentleman in No. 18. He's been at me about his room, and I think"—her voice dropped—"I think he isn't quite himself. If you wouldn't mind speaking to him—"

"What the devil do you mean by putting me to sleep in a hay-loft?"

Miss Marvin jumped, for the gentleman from No. 18 had followed uninvited and was talking over her shoulder. He stretched an arm across the door to bar her escape. "No, you don't. I don't know which of you two is responsible here, but I am going to have an answer out of somebody. I pay a decent price, I expect a decent room, and you put me in a garret that stinks like a rabbit hutch, and nearly brains me if I walk across the floor! Why, I wouldn't put a nigger to sleep in such a hole! What do you mean by it, I want to know?"

"One moment," said Gardiner. "Miss Marvin, may I trouble you for that register? Thanks. Here we are. I had to give you No. 18 because it was absolutely the last unoccupied room in the house. If you look, you can see for yourself that I'm speaking the truth."

A little checked, Trent bent his handsome head over the page. He was not drunk; but he had been drinking. Gardiner, sitting by the window on the far side of the table, leaned across, pointing out the entries with a small, brown, well-kept forefinger.

"These are my best rooms. They're occupied now by a Leeds fishmonger, but I can't very well turn him out for that. If I'd known you were coming—but as it was I

simply had to put you where I could. There's not a corner anywhere else."

"The place stinks," said Trent.

"Of apples. My predecessor used to store them there."

"Well, you should have warned me, then."

"I did," said Gardiner. "If you remember, I told you I was full, and wanted to show you the rooms, and you declined."

"That's right enough," said Trent. He swept up his thick, dark lashes and looked steadily at Gardiner, summing him up. Traveling on, his eyes met and fixed on a photograph that hung on the wall. "Hullo, I know that face," he said in a totally different tone, getting up and going towards it.

"My brother," said Gardiner.

"Your brother? Tom Gardiner of the Sappers is your brother? Why the deuce couldn't you say so before? Here, my good woman—" He held out half-a-crown to Miss Marvin, who nearly dropped it in her indignation, and was only restrained by an imperative sign from Gardiner which sent her out of the room. "Mhow: yes, I was actually with him when this was taken," Trent continued, with the frame in his hand. "I used to see a lot of him in those days. Nice youngster; only a mania for church-goin', and couldn't or wouldn't play bridge. And so you're his brother! What on earth do you want to keep a pot-house for?"

"It's a way of earning your living, like another."

"Leads to misunderstandings, though. Didn't he ever mention me?"

"Yes; but I couldn't be sure you were the same man."

"Well, I wouldn't say I am; times have changed since then," said Trent. He replaced the frame and established himself on the rug, squaring his broad shoulders against the mantelpiece, apparently settling down for a comfortable gossip. "I was a bit of a fire-eater in those days. I remember one time we were out riding—"

The tale he told was one of those which modest men leave

their friends to tell for them. It seemed to concern him no more than a casual newspaper paragraph about a casual stranger. "I couldn't do that now, you know," was his comment. He had quite forgotten his anger; indeed, he seemed to have worn out all power of sustained feeling, to be without shame as without vanity. He rambled on from story to story; presently he was pouring into their ears the tale of the scandal that had led to his retirement. Out it all came, in a curious mixture of indifference and maudlin self-pity. "That was the end of me," he said, staring at Gardiner with hazy, apathetic eyes. "I wasn't a bad sort of feller before — did one or two things a man might be proud of; but it was all up when I had to leave the old regiment. And just for the sake of a little devil who didn't care a rap about me — not a rap, I swear she didn't! Yes! it's the women who've been my ruin."

It was a melancholy exhibition. One might gather that he still presented a decent front to the world; whisky had loosened his tongue to-night, making him a traitor to himself, but he did not habitually drink. He said so, with unblushing candor. "It wasn't wine with me, you know; that was never my vice." He was, as Gardiner said, a good man gone wrong; but he had gone very far wrong. There was something cruel in the way the young man led him on to expose himself. Charity would have covered his sins, but cynicism drew them all out to look at. Denis's instincts were more healthy.

"Why don't you kick him out?" he said in an angry whisper.

"I'm not done with him yet. He amuses me."

"He makes me sick. It's beastly, Harry! You've no business to do it!"

"Think not? Now, he strikes me as fair game," said Gardiner, contemplating his guest with a complete absence of pity.

"He's drinking himself drunk on your whisky, and that girl waiting for him upstairs! If you don't think of him, you might of her!"

"True. I'd forgotten his wife," said Gardiner. He drew the decanter over to his side of the table and looked up, ready to break in. Unluckily Trent had caught the last word, and it started him off on a new tack.

"Neither of you young chaps married? Lucky dogs! you've the chances! I knew a little girl in Chatham once —"

Gardiner had kept his friend just a few minutes too long. He had now found his peculiar vein, and he grew eloquent. Denis had a clean life behind him, and a clean mind; Gardiner felt rather than saw him stirring in his chair, and held up a hand to keep him quiet. He himself was less fastidious, but even he did not much like what he had called up. There are things a man may say, and others he may not, and it was these last that Trent said. He was morally rotten. Still, Gardiner did not want a row.

"Funny tale, very," he said, when Trent had finished with the little girl at Chatham. "And now, I don't want to hurry you, but isn't it getting rather late? I'm afraid we shall be keeping Mrs. Trent up."

"My wife?" said Trent. He had just come to the table to fill up his glass from the decanter which Gardiner was keeping under his hand. Looking up with a smile, he added another sentence. Simultaneously, Denis sprang to his feet, the blood rushing into his face, and Gardiner caught up the first thing that came to his hand — the chisel that had opened the packing-case — and flung it at the speaker's head.

"Get out, you filthy swine!"

It took him in the middle of his forehead, and knocked him over. He fell without an effort to save himself, flat on the whole length of his back with his head in the fender. There he lay. Denis raised the lamp on high; Gardiner stooped over him — and recoiled.

"Good Lord!" he said, "the man's dead!"

CHAPTER II

A LIE THAT IS HALF A TRUTH

I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt.
GENESIS.

TRENT lay as he had fallen, with his head on the fender, in a pool of blood which slowly enlarged itself and sopped into the carpet. The sharp edge had fractured his skull. He was stone dead, beyond possibility of doubt, yet both men by a common instinct knelt down and tried to loosen his collar. The heavy head tumbled sideways, against Denis's arm. He sprang up and retreated, with a violent shudder.

"Poor beggar! Poor beggar!" said Gardiner under his breath. "I never saw anything so ghastly in my life! This thing's like a razor." He ran his finger down the edge of the fender. "Good Lord! what an appalling business! Well, I suppose the first thing is to have in the doctor; he can't do any good, of course, but still— Luckily there's one actually staying in the house. Ring the bell, do you mind, Denis? Or, wait a bit, I don't want the maids poking round; I'll go myself."

He was half-way to the door when Denis seized his arm.

"Stop a minute, Harry. Think."

"What's the use of waiting? May as well get it over!"

"No; but think—think! Can't you see what this means?"

His agitation was contagious. "I can see it's going to be very awkward with the house full of visitors, but it's not the time to think of that, is it? What the devil are you driving at?"

"You killed him," said Denis baldly.

"I did not!"

"You did. It's manslaughter, if not murder. It might mean hanging, and it'll pretty certainly mean prison."

"Prison!"

Every trace of color went out of Gardiner's face. In the momentary pause some one tapped at the door.

Gardiner wrenched himself free, and Denis sprang to shut out the intruder; but he was too late. The door, left unlatched by Miss Marvin, slid open at a touch. There stood Mrs. Trent, in her long muffling cloak and veil; she had come in quest of her husband.

Denis tried ineffectually to block out the view of the room, the lamp on the floor, the dead man, and Gardiner.

"You—you mustn't come in, Mrs. Trent. Your husband's had a sort of seizure—"

She said nothing, only plucked at his arm, struggling against it, her eyes, her whole being concentrated on the figure on the floor. Suddenly diving under the barrier, she fled to his side and sank down, a mere swirl of draperies. Denis, distracted, stooped over her. "Don't—don't!" he said. "Let us fetch a doctor—perhaps he's only fainted—"

"Fainted!" She raised her tragic little head; her eyes, ranging round the room, met and fixed on Gardiner. "He's been murdered!" she cried out. "Murdered—and you did it, you!"

The imaginative man is at the mercy of his nerves; there is always an unsound link in his courage, liable to snap at any unexpected strain. It is a question of sheer luck whether he finds out his weakness and is able to take precautions beforehand. The unimaginative man never understands this. To Denis's infinite dismay, Gardiner simply backed into the corner, throwing up his arm as if to ward a blow. Denis himself cried out the first denial that rose to his lips.

"Mrs. Trent, it was an accident, I give you my word it was!"

"It was murder," she contradicted swiftly, her young

voice gathering depth and force, scorn and anguish, her outstretched finger quivering. "He did it, he killed him, I read it in his eyes. Oh, he was all I had in the world, and you've taken him away! Oh, what shall I do — what shall I do?"

"Harry! Say something — tell her it's a mistake!"

"He can't!" cried the girl. "Look, look at him cowering there! Murderer! He daren't face me — he can't deny it!"

Less of his own will than because Denis's hands were on his shoulders, Gardiner slowly turned. He looked hang-dog. "I didn't do it!" he muttered, his eyes on the ground. "You heard what my friend said — it was an accident!" And then more loudly, gaining confidence: "I swear I never laid a finger on him — did I, Denis? I would have said so before — I would have explained at once, if I'd taken in what you were saying."

"You didn't lay a finger on him?" Mrs. Trent laughed out, a queer high note of triumph. "Ah — but you killed him all the same! I know! I can prove it! What I have here — Besides, look, look at his darling face — Oh, Guy!" The name broke from her in a great tremulous convulsive sob. She put out her hands blindly, clutching the edge of the table. "Oh, what is it? Oh, oh, it hurts! — I'm frightened — Louisa!"

"Great heavens! Ring the bell, Denis — quick!"

Denis nearly brought down the bell-rope. The next minutes were all confusion. People gathered like flies: the boots, Miss Marvin, half-a-dozen frightened servants, at last Mrs. Trent's elderly maid. She threw up her hands in horror, but she wasted no time on the dead man; her concern was all for her mistress. "Come away, Miss Dot dear, come! 'Tain't fit for you here!" The girl, shaken now by terrifying sobs, suffered herself to be led away; their steps died out down the passage.

Meanwhile the doctor had arrived, a brusque and dapper little man, hastily fetched in from the terrace. Gardiner, who was everywhere at once, arranging everything, cleared

the room for him to make his examination, leaving only Denis, Miss Marvin, and himself.

"Fracture of the base of the skull. No, I couldn't have done anything even if I'd been on the spot; must have been practically instantaneous. Slipped, you say, did he? H'm!" He bent to sniff at the dead man's lips. "Where was he standing?"

Gardiner reconstructed the scene, exact in every detail save one. "He came across to the table, to fill his glass, I suppose, and seemed to lose his balance—his feet flew up in the air. We didn't think anything of it, did we, Denis? It was the most ordinary tumble."

"Didn't strike against anything in falling, did he?"

"No; he went flat on his back, as you do on a slide."

"Sure? Well, how do you account for that, then?"

He pointed to a tiny star of blood on the dead man's forehead. Gardiner looked as he felt, nonplussed.

"I can't account for it."

"You can't, hey? Your friend, then—he any idea?"

"No," said Denis from the window, without turning round. There was an uncomfortable pause.

"What's all this mess of glass about?" asked Miss Marvin, who was listening with all her intelligent ears.

"I don't know—yes, I do, though; Major Trent had been having a whisky and soda, and dropped the tumbler as he fell. I remember hearing it smash."

"There you are, then, sir. A bit flew up and hit him. There's nothing cuts worse than broken glass, and the splinters they'll fly anywhere, they're that light and frivolous things. Why, I've nearly had my own eye out, falling up the pantry steps with a tray in my arms! That's what done it, you may depend."

Thus Miss Marvin, practical and positive. Little Dr. Scott nodded assent.

"H'm, yes; might have been that. The fellow was half tipsy, of course. No need to tell his wife so, but he smells like a pot-house. She seems to take it pretty queerly, by the way, from the glimpse I had of her," he added, bending

his bright and piercing eyes on Gardiner. "Has a special grudge against you, hey?"

"She accused me downright of murdering him at first," said the young man soberly. "Heaven knows why, for I'd never set eyes on either of them before. I hope she won't keep it up; it's rather a serious thing to have laid to one's charge. But I suppose I'd better take no notice; women in her state of health often take queer fancies into their heads, don't they?"

"Hey? Is that so? Poor child, poor child! I hope we shan't have any further trouble with her. It's a bad piece of work altogether," he added, getting up and dusting his knees. "You know, of course, that the body mustn't be moved till the police have seen it. You've sent for them, I suppose?"

"No, I haven't."

"You haven't? What are you staring for? Have to be an inquest, won't there? Can't give the certificate without it, can I?" snapped the little man; and then, lowering his voice out of respect for the dead: "You and your long-legged friend over there, who looks as if he'd be the better for a nip of sal volatile, you'll have to give evidence. Any one would think you'd never heard of an inquest before!"

"Of course. I was an ass not to think of it, but you see it's awkward for me, with the house full of people. However, that can't be helped. I'll telephone at once. Yes, what is it?"

Mrs. Trent's maid, at the door, had a very grave face.

"Can the doctor please come at once, sir? My mistress is taken ill."

The two men were left alone. Denis, who had been standing at the open window all this time, with his back to the room, turned round now to see Gardiner on his knees, hunting over the floor. "What are you doing?" he asked, breaking his long silence.

"Looking for my chisel. I don't think I'll leave that for the police to find."

The little doctor's jibe about sal volatile had not been baseless. Denis, though in his youth he had been through a frontier campaign which should have cured him of such weakness, looked and felt rather sick. Gardiner was less sensitive. He pursued his search without qualms. Denis watched him.

"What are you goin' to say to the police when they do come?"

"What you said to Mrs. Trent. You began it, Denis."

"You'll have to give evidence on oath at the inquest."

"That won't trouble my conscience."

"I suppose they'll call me as well."

"Safe to," assented Gardiner. Denis said nothing. The younger man, looking up, asked with a certain hardihood: "Are you going to give me away?"

"I won't if I can help it."

"By which you mean—?"

"If I'm asked right out, Did you throw the chisel at him? I'll have to say Yes; but short of that I'll do all I can to get you out of the scrape. I'd have been in it myself if I'd been standin' where you were."

"Only you'd have owned up at once, whereas I'm not going to," said Gardiner, with a short laugh. "I might have known you couldn't tell a lie, Denis. Here, I can't find this confounded thing. Where the devil can it have got to?"

Denis, putting his qualms in his pocket, went down on his knees and joined in the search. They looked all over the room, in every corner.

"I should say it must be underneath him," said Gardiner, with a reflective glance at the body, "but I don't know that I exactly want to look and see."

Denis with an uncontrollable shudder got up and retreated to the window.

"How can you talk like this? You make me sick!"

"My good Denis, I don't feel like a murderer before the corpse of his victim, if that's what you're driving at! I deny that I was in the least to blame. Anybody with a

spark of decent feeling must have done what I did. If he broke his head, poor brute, that wasn't my fault; it's what you might call the act of God. I'm not going to prison, if I can help it, for a crime I haven't committed. In the meantime, I want my chisel."

"Well, it's not — where you suggest," said Denis with an effort, "for I remember seeing it after he fell."

"You did? Then it must be here somewhere!"

But it was not.

"What the devil can have come to it?" said Gardiner, biting his mustache, and betraying his agitation by his language; for he did not usually swear.

"Mrs. Trent 'was kneelin' over that side."

"What, do you think she's got it up her sleeve? But in that case why didn't she bring it out and denounce me? Here, you'd better have a peg, Denis, you look as though you wanted one. What the deuce should she carry it away with her for?"

"I don't know; but it struck me she had something on the tip of her tongue to say just before she collapsed. Perhaps she meant to produce it, and then felt too sick."

There was a short silence. Denis sipped the whisky which his friend had forced on him. It was not so much Trent's death which had upset him, as Gardiner's failure, and the part which it forced him to play. He hated any contact with deception.

"Well, this is a sweet prospect," said Gardiner, with another short laugh. "Mrs. Trent, and you — let's hope the coroner won't ask awkward questions! Come on out now; it's no use hunting for a thing that isn't there. I'll lock up the room and summon the minions of the law."

"I wish you'd own up."

"Oh, confound you for a prig, Denis! I can't go back on what I've said, can I? It might perhaps have been better if I'd done it at first, but I'm committed to it now. I must just go on and trust to luck. It was you began it; don't you forget that!"

CHAPTER III

NOCTURNE

I saw a dream that made me afraid, and the thoughts of my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.— DANIEL.

UNDER the canopy of stars Harry Gardiner lay awake thinking of his sins; among which he did not, then or later, include any responsibility for the death of Trent. It was a shocking business, of course, and he was sorry, exceedingly sorry, things had turned out as they had; but it was no fault of his. You had to put a stopper on that sort of thing, in the interests of public decency. He even counted it to himself for righteousness that he had reacted so promptly and so vigorously against the flesh and the devil. "I didn't know I had it in me at this time of day to flare up like that!" he reflected ingenuously. Besides — and this for Gardiner settled the question and finally canonized his conduct — had not Denis said that in his shoes he would have done the same? Only Denis wouldn't have turned coward and told lies.

Gardiner was not given to introspection; he did not like himself well enough to think about himself, or stir up his own motives. In Denis's company, however, he was forced to think, because the unconscious Denis pointed the contrast between them at every turn. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*. This was the more painful, because Gardiner's eye was jaundiced; he saw his own vices very large, his virtues and excuses very small. He knew that the bloom had been rubbed off his sense of honor, but it did not console him in the least to reflect that the rough tumblings he had been through might very well have knocked out of him any sense of honor at all.

He and Denis had been together at school, from which Gardiner had run or rather walked away to sea about the time when Denis was going up for Woolwich. Gardiner went, not from any of the usual motives, but because kind friends had offered him a clerkship in one of the Dartford banks. He could not refuse to take himself off his father's hands, but he would not be a clerk. So one fine morning he came to town, hung about the Surrey Commercial Dock (not for the first time), and being a likely looking lad got taken on at a pinch on board the s.s. *Immerwald*, bound for South America. He signed on as O.S.; but at the last moment the cook of the *Immerwald*, coming on board very drunk, fell down the companion and had to be left behind in hospital with a broken leg; and Gardiner, on the strength of some indiscreet boasts, was turned into the galley in his stead to do his worst. It must be owned that his worst was rather bad. But he was quick and handy, and by the time they reached Bahia he was not cursed by the steward after every meal. In Bahia he deserted. Latin America had always been his goal. His mother was half Spanish; he had absorbed the lovely language of Castile in his cradle.

In Bahia they do not talk Spanish, but Gardiner was not slow to pick up Portuguese; and in his first shore berth, as cook in a sailors' eating-house, he added to his vocabulary a smattering of Italian, Dutch, and Swedish. French and German he had learned at home. He was un-English in his gift for languages; un-English too in other ways, notably in his readiness to take color from his surroundings. During the next five years he generally passed for a Spaniard. He wandered over the length and breadth of America, going north to Los Angeles, west to Mollendo, south to Santiago de Chile: good cooks are in demand everywhere. He was a rolling stone, but he gathered moss, which he dutifully sent home to the Kentish rectory where he had been born.

At twenty-two he was in the Canaries, where Fate, intervening, pushed him into his true vocation. An Orotavan

fondista, who had come into money and was wild to get home to Seville, offered him the goodwill of his place for a song. Gardiner accepted for the fun of the thing, and fell in love with his trade. Inns kept by a butler or a cook are proverbially prosperous, and he had been butler and cook in one. The *Tres Amigos* flourished; Gardiner's remittances home became regular and substantial. It seemed that he had found his niche at last.

He stayed in Orotava three years. Then, without warning, for the first time since his son left home, the rector missed his weekly letter. Four months went by, and Mr. Gardiner nearly fretted himself into his grave. At the end of that time the correspondence was taken up again—from Sydney. Over his reasons for this quick change to the Antipodes Gardiner threw an airy veil. "I was plenty sick of the Islands, I thought I'd get a move on," he wrote. Mr. Gardiner accepted the excuse in all good faith. Tom, his younger son, a conscientious young cadet, thought it sounded rather fishy; but Tom was always a little distrustful of this un-English brother of his.

The truth being that Gardiner had been burning his fingers in his first love affair. It was strange, in the life he had led, that he should have kept his innocence so long. He owed that to his mother, who had done what few mothers dare—taken her courage in both hands and told him plainly what to expect. Then she set the seal on her counsels by dying during his first voyage. She had been very fair, as well as very wise; her son never forgot her, and found it easier to follow her advice because her beauty and wits had trained his senses to be fastidious. But he had a passionate temperament under his superficial hardness, and, never having fribbled away his feelings in light connections, he came to Pilar Anguita with all the fire of unspoiled youth. In her pale tropical lily loveliness she seemed to him the incarnation of his dreams, flower of the Virgin for whom she was named.

She should have been what he thought her; she belonged to the guarded class, the class that does not allow its daugh-

ters to set foot in the streets unattended. Her father was a rich man, as riches go in Tenerife, her mother had been a countess. Nevertheless, this sheltered lily was pleased to run concurrent intrigues with Gardiner and with an idle young sprig of nobility from Madrid. Gardiner, it should be said, had no thought of intrigue; his intentions were strictly honorable, and he would have been content to "pluck the turkey-hen" outside her window in humble adoration till he was in a position to ask for her hand. When he found himself launched into another course he was horrified, conscience-stricken, eager only to make amends. But Pilar had no intention of getting married. She preferred to enjoy herself in her own way in her own home, with the connivance of her *ama*, a latter-day Celestina. She ran her brace of lovers till she made the inevitable blunder, and Gardiner arrived on an evening dedicated to his rival.

The scene that followed brought the house about their ears, and Pilar's career found an abrupt close. She was whisked off to a convent, whence she eloped, a month later, with one of her father's grooms, who, as it then came out, had antedated both his rivals by a year or so.

Gardiner did not hear the end of the story till long after. He had found it expedient to leave the Islands immediately after his duel with Don Luis. You may call a bullet in the chest pneumonia, and so long as you do not die nobody can question your assertion. But the very dogs in the streets of Orotava knew all about the duel, which was conducted on the American plan of turning both combatants loose on opposite sides of a wood, to shoot at sight. Gardiner was out to kill; only luck, and a silver match-box, diverted his bullet from his rival's heart.

He went to Sydney to get away from himself. It took him two years. Then he came home. England, which he had seen twice only since he was sixteen, amused him at first; but he soon grew tired of it — it was too cramped, he wanted more space, fewer people. Still, he could not go far; his father was getting an old man, and clung to him. A winter walking tour discovered his ideal on the Semois. He

settled his affairs at the Easedale with his usual luck and expedition, and was free to start his new life — if only —

Since the affair with Pilar, Gardiner had given women a wide berth. The burnt child dreads the fire, and besides he was mightily distrustful of his own temperament. He did not make the mistake of despising all women for the fault of one; but raptures and revenges, duels and despair did not fit into the scheme of life mapped out by his practical mind. Friendships did. He had many friends. He liked middle-aged men, unlucky men, lame dogs of any kind; and his friends were without exception better men than he. A choice which showed that, given the chance, he would grow upwards and not down. And of all his friends Denis stood first, partly for old time's sake, but mainly for no other reason than that of all men in the world there was none he respected more.

"Dear old ass!" he said to himself, between amusement, affection, and envy, contrasting his own easy code with Denis's Puritan stiffness. "One of God's dandies, that's what he is, but I wouldn't have him different, no, I wouldn't, though he's putting me in the divvle of a hole with his whimsies. Of course he's right, I ought to have owned up at once, it would have been far better in every way. But that unlucky speech of his gave me a loophole, and I jumped at it — I'd have jumped at anything then. I didn't exactly shine on that occasion, and he sees I didn't. . . . I wonder, would it be better even now to eat my own words and make a clean breast of it? Upon my soul, I've half a mind to! Ten to one I shall be caught out over this inquest; in fact, I don't see how I'm going to escape, unless Mrs. Trent is too ill to show up — and I don't desire that, be shot if I do! poor little woman."

A blank supervened. He took his pipe out of his mouth and listened. He was sleeping on the roof, a habit he had learned in Orotava, and earlier in the night there had been significant sounds below. All was quiet now, however. "No, I definitely do not want her to be ill," he resumed his meditation. "I haven't sunk to that yet, no matter

what it costs me. And what will it cost me? Not hanging; Denis was talking through his hat there, no jury could possibly bring it in murder. But prison? I'm not sure I wouldn't rather hang."

He stared up at the stars. Walls and a roof instead of the limitless freedom of the night. Day has its bounds, either a bright blue dome or a ceiling of cloud, but night is open to the infinite. You may lose yourself climbing to the pale moon, you may send out your soul for ever through space beyond the ranges of the stars. There were two men in Gardiner. By day he was the prosperous practical inn-keeper; by night — even he himself did not know how much he owed to those solitary nights of his, though he did know that he would have hated to have Denis spread his mattress on the roof beside him. In cities Gardiner was an alien; but trees, mountains, rivers were all alive for him, large calm gracious beings to whom he belonged, with whom he was at ease. Loneliness and freedom were the breath of his life; and was he to exchange them for an eight-foot cell with a spy-hole in the door? "Decidedly I'd rather hang," he said to himself in a crawling sweat. He faced a new idea. "I believe I funk prison."

Fear. It was an unfamiliar feeling. He had never been afraid of men, not even as a boy on the *Immerwald* when the mate had been drinking; he had kept out of the way at such times, but he had grinned indifferent. Nor was he afraid of death; he had seen it too often. But this? "I've never had much opinion of men who funk things, but I believe I'd run like a hare if it was a question of prison — well, to all intents and purposes I did. Pleasant. I didn't know I was a coward before. Hullo! is that that poor little woman again? If she loses her kid, I *shall* feel like a murderer."

An idea, conceived in his mind hours before, had been growing in secret, and now came suddenly to birth as a resolution. "If she loses her kid through me, I'll hold my tongue about Trent's last bit of beastliness," he said, and registered the vow. "I do owe her something, and I'll pay

this way. It'll mean a lot to her: I believe nothing, not his death nor even the kid's, would hit her so hard as that last thing he said. Probably it didn't in the least represent his normal attitude, but a woman would never see that. She'd feel as I felt when I heard Pilar — No, that I'll spare her! Yet it'll mean a lot to me too — great heavens, but it will! Say I'm committed for trial after this inquest. If I tell the whole truth, I shall probably be acquitted. If I don't I may get — six months? a year? Oh, Lord! The point is that mine's such a beastly lame story without that speech; I'm throwing away my one excuse. . . . Yet if I speak I shall make a clean sweep of all she has left, after practically robbing her of her husband and child — no, I can't and won't, *sea lo que fuere*, in common decency I must hold my tongue. Well, anyhow, this disposes of any idea of my owning up voluntarily, as Denis wants — by the way, I must give him a hint to shut his mouth too. He'll do it to spare a woman, even if it involves sacrificing me. Chivalrous is Denis; I suspect he'll come a bad cropper one of these days, and it'll hurt him worse than it did me, because he's finer stuff. There's the dawn — I wonder how it looks over the Semois at Frahan? What a jolly place the world is! and I've an impression that in a manslaughter case they won't allow bail. Well, I've done enough soul-searching for the present, and I think I will now go to by-by. *Amanecerá Dios, y medraremos.*"

Five minutes later he was asleep under the paling stars, while the dawn came up in silver over Helvellyn, this astute young man who was ready to throw away everything for a romantic scruple, and call it common decency. Gardiner was not quite so astute, nor so level-headed, nor so cowardly as he thought himself.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN FIRST WE PRACTICE TO DECEIVE

Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.— PROVERBS.

FATALITY AT GRASMERE

THE inquest on the body of Major Trent, who was killed by a fall at the Easedale Hotel, Grasmere, on Thursday evening, was conducted by Dr. Ellis, coroner for Westmorland, at the Easedale Hotel on Friday.

Mr. Helmsley Trent, of Perche Place, Marybourne, Hants, identified the body as that of his brother, Major Guy Glisson Trent, of Thurlow Park, Surrey, and stated that the age of the deceased was thirty-nine years. He was traveling in the Lakes with his wife on a motoring tour.

Mr. H. C. Gardiner, proprietor of the Easedale Hotel, stated that the deceased, accompanied by his wife and her maid, came to the hotel on Thursday evening and engaged rooms for the night. They dined in their own apartments. About 9.30 P.M. deceased came to witness's private parlor and made a complaint about his room. It was not usual for guests to come to his parlor. Deceased was not drunk, but he was in a quarrelsome mood, and inclined to make a row. Witness satisfied him that the inconvenience complained of was due to the house being full. Deceased then stayed on talking in a friendly way. About ten o'clock witness suggested that it was getting late. Deceased came to the table to fill his glass, and was standing by it when his feet slipped from under him, and he fell backwards. No one was in the room except witness and his friend, Mr. Merion-Smith. They were sitting by the window. The table was between them and the deceased. They could not have reached him

in time to prevent his falling. Witness went at once to his assistance, and found that he was already dead. His head had struck the fender, which was about eight inches high, and had a sharp edge. Deceased did not speak or move at all after the fall.

By the Coroner: Deceased had helped himself to whisky several times uninvited. It was witness's private whisky. He had a tumbler in his hand which was broken when he fell. Witness suggested that it was getting late because he thought deceased had had enough. He was not drunk.

By the Jury: Deceased was perfectly friendly after the first. He was talking about India, where they had discovered mutual friends.

Miss Emily Marvin, housekeeper at the Easedale Hotel, said that the deceased came to her to complain of his room. He was not drunk, but he had had a drop. He seemed a very irritable sort of gentleman. Witness took the complaint to Mr. Gardiner because she felt she could not manage him herself. The floors were beeswaxed every Thursday morning. They had been done that day. They were often a bit slippery at first. She had once slipped down herself and broken a tray of glasses.

Mr. Denis Arthur Merion-Smith, aeronautical engineer, of Bredon, stated that he was in the parlor with Mr. Gardiner when deceased came in. Witness did not join in the conversation, but he saw all that passed. Deceased's feet seemed to fly up in the air. He was quite dead when they reached him. Witness loosened his collar, but was sure it would do no good.

The Foreman: What in your opinion was the cause of the deceased's fall? — I should not like to say. He was not intoxicated, but he was not quite steady on his feet. A perfectly sober man would probably have saved himself.

Dr. Leonard Scott, of Westby, said that he was staying at the Easedale Hotel, and was called to attend deceased at about 10.30 P.M. Deceased had apparently been dead about ten minutes when he examined him. There was bleeding from the ears, with a deep cut at the back of the head;

also a very slight abrasion on the forehead, but this was of no significance. It might have been caused by a splinter of glass flying up and striking him. Death was due to fracture of the base of the skull, and was probably instantaneous. In cases of severe fracture that is not unusual.

By the Jury: If the deceased's feet slipped from under him, as described by the other witnesses, his head would strike the fender first. Deceased was a heavy man, and such a fall would be quite sufficient to fracture his skull.

P. C. Thornborough gave details of the position of the body. . . .

There was plenty more. Dr. Scott skimmed through it all to the verdict of accidental death, and the jury's expressions of sympathy with the widow. He read it standing in the street of Ambleside, and then doubled the paper under his arm and trudged the five miles back to Grasmere.

The Easedale Hotel was no longer full. A violent death, an inquest, and a confinement had emptied the house and attracted instead a crowd of casual sightseers. The lounge and terrace were full of them. Scott asked for Gardiner, and climbed many stairs to the roof. Coming out of a last trap-door, he beheld Gardiner and his friend among the chimney-pots, in close conversation, which died instantly on his appearance.

There was a table, there were chairs, there was a bed beneath an awning. Gardiner, at full length on a lounge, swung his feet to the ground and welcomed his visitor. Merion-Smith acknowledged him with a distant nod.

"I've brought you the local rag," said Scott, planting himself firmly on a hard upright chair. "It has a full report. I walked over to Ambleside for it."

Gardiner thanked him amiably, glanced over the sheet, and passed it to Denis, who read solidly through from end to end; this to keep out of the conversation. "Here's a man I don't know: safe to be a bounder: confound his impudence!"—such was his attitude to the casual stranger. He did not like the middle classes.

"We're up here because he didn't fancy the parlor," said Gardiner, with a lazy nod towards his friend. "Says the place makes him sick. You'd expect a flying man to have cranks, wouldn't you? He has enough to stock an engine. What do you recommend for nerves, doctor?"

"M'm! you don't look up to much yourself. You're the color of brown holland."

"Me? I'm as limp as a rag; never felt so pale in my life. All these agitations are so trying," said Gardiner, filling his pipe and pushing the cigarettes across the table. "Help yourself. I can recommend them; that fellow never buys a cheap smoke. How's Mrs. Trent?"

"As well as can be expected."

"Poor little woman," said Gardiner. "I say, doctor, I am beastly sorry about this. Sorrier than I've been about most things in my life."

The sincere feeling behind his words drew out Scott's impatient reply.

"Woman! She's a child: not a day over twenty. A girl's too young at that age to marry and face this sort of thing. I'd make it illegal."

"My dear man, don't shout at me! I don't know how old she is: couldn't tell her from Eve, if I met her. I never saw her without that motor veil thing hanging over her face. She's lost her child, hasn't she?"

"She has."

"Do you know where she comes from, or anything about her people?"

"What the maid told me. She has no people. Lived till her marriage with an uncle and aunt who owed her a grudge about some money that was left to her over the uncle's head. They wouldn't let her speak to a man, for fear she should marry and they lose the enjoyment of it. Trent made her elope with him. Naturally she looked on him as a sort of St. George."

"A good thing he died before she found him out, then."

"He was a rascal, was he?"

"Well, he wasn't precisely a St. George."

"H'm!" said Scott. It was an expression he used often, and with varying meaning. Gardiner smoked in silence. Denis, who had read to the end of the inquest, propped his tall, immaculate person against a chimney-stack and watched them both. When he did not snap, the little doctor expressed himself like an educated man, and his voice was pure in quality. These things were in his favor.

"Has she still got that idea in her head about me?" asked Gardiner.

"How do I know, man? Do you suppose I talk to my patients about things of that kind? She hasn't mentioned you at all, so far as I know. Lies still, says nothing, asks no questions—brooding over that scamp, I suppose. Well, she's getting better, and that's all that concerns me."

"Yes," said Gardiner. He looked very tired. "If you see a chance, give her my regrets and condolences and all that, will you? You might pitch it pretty strong. I shan't be here to do it myself."

"You won't? Where are you going?"

"Oh, I've sold the place, and I'm clearing out. Didn't you know? I was going in any case at the end of the month, and I've put it forward a bit, to give my successor a chance. All this fuss is very bad for trade. It's emptied the house. It'll fill up again quicker if I'm out of it."

"Where are you going yourself, hey?"

"To the most beautiful place in the Ardennes, which I design to run as a sanatorium—no, not a common open-air shop, but healthful bracing breezes for the jaded, don't you know? Very great it's going to be. I invite you to come out and pay me a visit."

"H'm! do you think I have nothing to do but run about the Continent enjoying myself?"

"Oh, I thought you might combine business with pleasure—see the place, and then recommend it to your patients. I should be charmed to receive them."

"You would, would you? Not half so pleased as they'd be to come."

"Why, who are your patients?" asked Gardiner, idly answering the significance of his tone.

"Criminals," said the little man. "I'm doctor at Westby Jail — where you'd be at this minute, if Mrs. Trent had had her way."

Denis would not look at his friend. "I can't say I envy you your job," remarked the young man.

"That just shows you don't know anything about it," was the instant retort. "Criminals have souls as well as you, haven't they? There are better men in prison than scores I've met 'outside, whom our ungodly laws can't or won't touch. I've known one man get eighteen months for stealing a pair of boots, and another let off with a fine and a caution for roasting a cat on the fire. Christians? Why, we haven't got up to the ten commandments yet! The Jews did put *Thou shalt not kill* and *Thou shalt not commit Adultery* before *Thou shalt not steal*; but impurity's nothing to us, and cruelty not much more. Christians! We reserve our jails for any one who dares to meddle with our sacred property. Upon my soul, I wonder any man can find the face to refuse the women a share in mending the laws of this land, considering the pretty mess we've made of them ourselves!"

He shot out of his chair and marched to the edge of the roof. Gardiner followed, laughing, and sat on the parapet. A rose and silver sunset was darkening the fells above Ease-dale Tarn, and the moon, a globe of pearl, made beautiful the cold gray eastern sky.

"I don't know what you want to leave your own country for," said Scott, still irascible, but simmering into calm. "Isn't this good enough for you?"

"Oh, I'm out for a land where they have more Christian laws," said Gardiner easily. "England's too civilized to be livable," he added.

Scott did not hear him. He was studying the house under their feet.

"That's Mrs. Trent's room below, I suppose? And your

parlor below that, on the ground floor? Any one in that south wing opposite could see straight in. Lucky for you there was nobody watching on Thursday evening."

"*Lucky?* What the devil do you mean?"

Scott turned round and stared in the face.

"You didn't want any visitors in hysterics, did you? Enough people involved in it already, aren't there? What do you mean yourself?"

"I thought," said Gardiner, "I thought you were echoing Mrs. Trent's idea, and suggesting I'd done him in."

It was the best he could do, but it was not good. Scott stared at him with his bright eyes, shifted them to Denis, and brought them back to Gardiner again. Gardiner knew that in the first moment of surprise he had started violently, changed color, showed all the signs of guilt. Nothing could erase that impression.

"Your nerves must be in a bad way for you to jump like that at an innocent remark," said Scott dryly.

"They are, I told you so. You can give me something for them, if you like. I don't mind swallowing your beastlinesses."

"No," said Scott. He pulled out his watch. "I must go to my patient. Good-night to you both." He climbed down through the trap-door, and then poked his head up again to add: "Mind, I never meddle with what isn't my concern. Never."

He was seen no more, and they heard him descending the ladder.

"Damn," said Gardiner.

"He won't make any use of it," said Denis. "That's not a bad little chap, Harry."

"Not a bad little chap? He's a most confoundedly inquisitive little chap! He won't rest till he's ferreted out the whole thing. Oh, *damn!* I wouldn't have had this happen for anything. Why the devil couldn't I keep my countenance? I thought I might have trusted myself for that!"

He paced up and down in a fury.

"You've had a tryin' time."

"Trying? I've had a scarifying time! That inquest, when the foreman began pumping you—I'd have murdered you as well, Denis, if you hadn't been adroit. But if I'm going to lose my nerve over such trifles as this—what an ass! oh, what an ass!"

He threw himself back on the lounge. Denis could not help feeling that he took it rather weakly. He did not allow for the rift in his friend's armor, that demoralizing fear of confinement. In these last few days their positions seemed to have been reversed.

"Scott can't do anything," he said rather coolly. "It's no use his suspectin' if there's no one he can pump, and there isn't. I'm not going to give it away, and you aren't either, when you're yourself again. As to Mrs. Trent, she can't prove anything from the chisel—you might have left it there from openin' the case. Besides, Scott wouldn't discuss it with her. He's above that."

"I dare say you're right, but I wish I hadn't been such an ass, and I wish he weren't the doctor at Westby," said Gardiner, with a huge yawn, "it brings it so unpleasantly near. Oh, Lord! I am tired. Do you mind clearing out now? I expect I shall sleep like a log. Please the pigs, in another couple of weeks' time I'll be out of this over-civilized, over-populated country!"

CHAPTER V

THE FLY ON THE WALL

I only knew one poet in my life:
And this, or something like it, was his way.
How it strikes a Contemporary.

THREE days after the inquest Denis came up to town to interview a timber merchant as to a contract about which there had been a difference of opinion. He looked down on the man through his eyeglass, carried all his points, and departed, leaving exasperation in his wake. After this, finding he had some hours to spare before he need catch his train to Bredon, he went to pay a call on his cousin Lettice.

Denis was, like his friend Gardiner, the son of a clergyman; but not of a poor country parson. Denis's father was honorary canon of Rochester and rural dean; he held a family living, and had besides a comfortable income of his own. There was some excuse for the double name. The Merions were a penniless Irish family with a pedigree derived from the ancient kings (all Irish pedigrees derive from the ancient kings). The Smith and the money had come to them together, a couple of generations back, from an eccentric old bachelor who had loved and lost one of the daughters of the house. Marrying late, Canon Merion-Smith was over fifty when his only son was born and his wife died. Denis had only a nurse to mother him, but he did not suffer; he was a very happy small boy, who from his babyhood never thought of anything but engines. He was not at all like his father, an easy-going Irishman with a strong sense of humor, but they were inseparable friends, who explored the path of knowledge hand in hand. There was no question of parental authority. Denis did what was

required either because he considered it reasonable, or else to please his father, to whom the staid small boy was a perpetual fund of amusement.

Canon Merion-Smith taught his son at home till he was fourteen, and then, rather doubtfully, sent him to Rochester, whither his friend Harry Gardiner had preceded him. Doubtfully, because he was beginning to distrust his own training. He did not think Denis would be happy at school; but he had no desire to be the parent of a prig. Denis was not happy. He hated arbitrary rules; he could never get into his head that it was not his to reason why. Only Gardiner made his schooldays endurable. He stayed at Rochester till he was nearly seventeen, and then passed unexpectedly without extra coaching straight into Woolwich. He was very clever, and strikingly handsome in a thin, aristocratic way, but he thought no more of his abilities than of his good looks. Denis was proud, but he had not a trace of vanity. He was an example of the not uncommon blend of class arrogance and personal modesty.

He passed out of Woolwich first in his batch, went to Chatham, to Rangoon, saw active service in a frontier campaign — the most unhappy years of his life. He had gone into the army to please his father, but he hated discipline, and his heart was set on aeronautics. When Canon Merion-Smith died, Denis resigned his commission and devoted himself to the problems of flight. The way of inventors is hard. He lost all his own money and some of Gardiner's, who came back into his life in time to do the beloved aeroplane a service which Denis, conservative in gratitude, never forgot. He brought himself to the verge of bankruptcy. At his last sixpence he fell in with Sydney Wandesforde, a well-known motor-racing amateur, who had transferred his interest to the new sport, and was as keen on the practical side of flying as Denis on the theoretical. He had what Denis had not — a bottomless purse and family influence to back it. They joined forces, and from that time Denis's future was assured.

His cousin Lettice — Læticia Jane Smith — had been in

his life for many years, since she, with her mother and sisters, came to settle in the village of which Canon Merion-Smith was incumbent. Rosabel and Stella were charming, half Irish and half French; but Lettice, the eldest, had always been Denis's ally. She was deliberate where they were quick, silent while they chattered, methodical instead of happy-go-lucky. They were clever, but she was the born student, patient, accurate, thorough. The household was always short of money, so Lettice, who suffered in that atmosphere of elegant muddle, left home as soon as she could and set up for herself. She was very fond of her relations, and they of her, but she found them trying to live with. Lettice had a temper; she said herself it was a dumb devil. Still, since it was very strictly dumb, you had to know her well, and watch her carefully, before you discovered its existence.

She now occupied an attic in Pimlico, and worked all day in the British Museum library. She might have been more comfortable in a boarding-house, but she preferred solitude, or rather silence; she was perennially interested in her fellow-creatures, but she did not want to be talked to by them. She was always the spectator, never the actor, having eyes, and ears, a synthetic mind, and that delicate sense of humor, pity and irony in one, which is a lamp to the feet of its possessor.

But what marked Lettice off from other people was her passion for self-obliteration. Most of us in our hearts love to fill the center of the stage. Lettice was miserable there. She liked to be the fly on the wall. Yet she was unselfish as well as selfless, gentle, accommodating, all things to all men. She was like a penny-in-the-slot machine for doing good: you put in your need, out came her response: and she asked no more gratitude than the machine. To thank her was like touching the horns of a snail. A harmless whim in many ways, yet with elements of danger; for tastes of this sort strengthen as they grow, and Lettice's friends were beginning to fear she would fade away altogether to an impersonal ghost, unless something happened to call her back.

She should have been Merion-Smith too; she owed the affix to the same Irish grandmother from whom Denis had inherited his profile, his accent, his superstitions, and his family pride. He had been known to send back a letter addressed to the name of Smith. Lettice, on the other hand, had dropped the hyphen with all celerity. Denis might lecture her on her slackness; she concurred amiably so long as she was with him, and then went on her way exactly as before. Lettice on the surface was all sweet pliability, but underneath lay solid rock. Denis faced the world as an obstinate, pugnacious Irishman, whereas a skilful hand could guide him with a silken thread. Lettice read him like a book and made soft fun of him, but always with a reserve of peculiarly tender affection; she thought a great deal of her cousin. And Denis thought a great deal — a very great deal — of her. He was aware that in half her innocent speeches she was, to put it gracefully, having him on; but what did that matter? Lettice was Lettice. He did not analyze his friends; he idealized them.

Denis was received at No. 33 Canning Street by the daughter of the house, a smart young person in silk stockings who invited him, with never a "Sir" to her sentence, to step up and find Miss Smith in the top back attic. The stairs were dark; Denis, gloomily reflecting on the decadence of the lower classes, fell over a pair of boots and trod in a dust-pan which flew up and hit him. He was not in the best of tempers when he knocked at his cousin's door.

"Come in!" called out an abstracted voice, wearily raised; and he obeyed. There stood Lettice in the middle of the floor, holding out with both arms before her nose a newspaper which enwrapped her, mind and body. Lettice had been known, when she came in from the Museum after her day's work, to read through the whole of a novel, standing under the gas, before she moved to take off her hat. It took some time for Denis's presence to penetrate, and then she lowered her arms slowly and looked round.

"O-oh," she said. "I thought you were the milk. Sit down, sit down."

She folded up her paper and poked it under a book, took away his hat and stick, and fetched the milk from the passage, hurrying slowly, as her custom was. Denis sat down, and discovered that he was very glad to be with her again. A cooling fountain in life's dry, dreary sand, that was what Lettice represented. She was not a beauty; she had none of the attributes of a heroine. Her nose was nondescript, her complexion poor, her mouth large, though there was character in the full under lip; character also, and brains, in the big forehead which she hid beneath her soft brown hair. For the rest, she had drooping shoulders and a long slim neck; she chose and put on her clothes like a Frenchwoman; but her best points were the set and shape of her graceful little head, and the somewhat misleading sweetness of her hazel eyes.

Her room was a long white attic, one end curtained off. There was a window in the gable facing west, and in the window a table overflowing with manuscripts and books; sheets of foolscap covered with her graceful writing, an Old English text, a Latin grammar, a treatise on court hand. She was trying to make up for a haphazard education by teaching herself. As she passed on her way to the cupboard, she drew a sheet of paper out of the muddle and presented it to Denis.

"Now you can just look through that while I'm making the tea, and see if there are any mistakes," she enjoined him in the minute expressive voice which was one of her charms to those who found her charming. Denis found himself faced by a Latin exercise. When he had learned all his cousin could tell him about the wreaths and the roses that adorned the girls and the queens, he turned the page, and came on something more attractive. In her hours of ease Lettice was a poet. Looking up from her task with the bread knife, she saw what he was doing, turned a deep pink, and silently but swiftly removed the sheet from the fingers. Denis laughed.

"Haven't you anything to show?"

"No, I haven't," said Lettice, acerb and forbidding.

"'Sheep on a lonely road,
Gray in the gray —'"

Denis quoted maliciously. The poet covered her ears with her hands.

"Oh, do-o-on't!"

"Well, let me see the rest of it!"

"Well, it isn't finished; it's no good looking at a thing till it's finished, is it?" retorted Lettice in a soft flurry of exasperation. Her poetry was dug out of her own soul, and she suffered the pains of vivisection in hearing it discussed. Denis knew this well, and Lettice knew he knew it. Looking like an affronted kitten, she retired into a silence that the brutal critic might have called sulky, and seemed disposed to stay there. But Denis knew how to make his peace. Just then the kettle boiled over. He was quick to lift it off — and to put it down again in a hurry, shaking his fingers. Before he could find his handkerchief, down swooped Lettice's arm; she seized the handle, bore it away, took her time over filling the teapot, ostentatiously stayed to settle the cozy; then, having displayed beyond possibility of oversight the superior hardness of her palm, she replaced the kettle on the hob, and returned to her toasting fork, exuding vain-glory.

This incident settled, they talked of the aeroplane. This was invariably Lettice's first question, and it brought down a shower of information, all water on a duck's back. Considering what excellent brains she had, it was surprising how dense she could be when she chose. When Denis's fluent Irish tongue ran dry, she was ready with her next question.

"And did you have a nice time at Grasmere with dear Harry?"

"No, I didn't," said Denis with unexpected force. "I had a perfectly beastly time!"

"Dear, dear! How was that?"

"Oh, things went wrong," said Denis vaguely. He wanted to tell the whole story — Lettice seemed to purify and sweeten all she took into her knowledge, and this badly needed sweetening. He hated it; he hated his evasions at

the inquest, what Gardiner called his adroitness; he hated soiling his fingers; he was vaguely dissatisfied with his friend. But since, for Gardiner's sake, he could not tell her all, he told her nothing. Half-truths were no good with Lettice. "By the by, why didn't you come?" he said. "I was expectin' you all the time. I couldn't think where you'd got to. You as good as promised to turn up!"

"Were you very disappointed?"

"No. No, I can't say I was — not altogether. I want you to meet Harry, but I didn't want you this time. Queer chap he is — you may think you know a man, but you never do."

Lettice's eyebrows moved upwards ever so little. "How do you mean queer?"

"Oh, I don't know. He has all sorts of cranks. Last time he was at Bredon, that cold spell when all the pipes were burstin', nothing would do but he must sleep out in the garden all the time. And it was just the same at Grasmere, though it rained cats and dogs. You can't be even with his fads," Denis added with a sigh, extending himself in his chair, his long legs stretched half across the hearth. "He's off almost at once to that place in the Ardennes I was tellin' you about. I've promised to run over there next summer. I wish you'd come too, Lettice, as you didn't bring it off this time."

"You *said* you didn't want me," murmured Lettice reproachfully.

"I didn't want you when things were all beastly. But I do want you to meet Harry. I want your opinion of him."

To this Lettice made no reply. She set a few slow, neat stitches in the cloth she was embroidering.

"Whereabouts is it, this place in the Ardennes?"

"Near Bouillon. You can get there for next to nothing, if that's what you're thinkin' of, but I wish you'd let me take you. I did rather well over that deal this morning and I'm rollin'. After all, you're as good as my sister. You might just as well."

Lettice did not thank him; that was taken for granted.

They understood each other¹ so well that words were often superfluous.

"If it's not very expensive I might manage it myself," she said. "My old man in Harley Street says I've got to take a holiday, so I suppose I must go somewhere, just to satisfy him. And I should rather like to see the Ardennes."

"Have you been to the doctor again? Why didn't you tell me before, Lettice? What does he say?"

"He says," said Lettice with inimitable unction, "that I am in a state of thorough nervous exhaustion, and ought to take six months' rest. So."

"Then I hope you're going to do it!"

Lettice smiled. She did not look particularly docile. Denis was beguiled into lecturing her about her health, though he knew it was time wasted — nay, rather, time mispent. For Miss Smith was like a pig, and if you pulled her one way she was apt to go the other. In this case, however, it seemed that she had fairly made up her mind before he came to a holiday abroad, for presently she let slip that she had been studying a guide to the Ardennes, which she had borrowed from a neighbor below. Denis sent her down to borrow it again.

While she was away he wandered about, looking at her books. Under a fat dictionary he came upon the paper she had been reading when he entered, and he pulled it out to see if she still took what he called the Radical rag. Its name stared him in the face: *The Westmorland Gazette*. It was doubled back at page four: *Fatality at Grasmere*.

He wheeled as she came into the room. "Lettice, how on earth did you get hold of this thing?"

She stopped dead for a moment, then came on.

"I ordered it."

"What for?"

"Because I'd seen something about the accident, and I wanted to know more. So I went to Finch's at the corner and asked him to get me the local paper, and he did."

Lettice had a talent for explaining the obvious.

"Where did you see anything about the accident?"

"There was a paragraph in my halfpenny rag."

"Confound!" said Denis, black as a thunder-cloud.

Lettice smiled, recovering her equanimity as he lost his. "Well, you shouldn't go and make interesting things like aeroplanes and become a public character," she murmured *pianissimo*.

"Why didn't you tell me that you knew?"

She looked at him, allowing her speakingly derisive eyes to retaliate that question.

"I couldn't tell you about it, it wasn't my affair," said Denis hotly and confusedly. "Gardiner doesn't want the story all over the place. How could I help it, Lettice? But when I was talkin' about Easedale, I think you might have let me know you knew!"

"My dear child, I couldn't begin on it if you didn't, could I?" said Lettice patiently. "I was simply *longing* to ask questions. It was nice, proper, lady-like feeling made me hold my tongue, what you always say you like. And now you're cross with me! Well, well."

Denis was cross; he stood crumpling the paper in his hands, visibly fuming. Lettice took it away from him and smoothed it out.

"I shan't talk about it to Mr. Gardiner when I come to Roehhaut, if that's what you're afraid of."

"Are you really comin' to Roehhaut?"

"Don't you want me now you know I know?"

She looked at him with those impish eyes.

"You know too much, Lettice!" said her cousin, discomfited, half laughing. She turned away with her small foreign shrug.

"Dear, dear! there's no pleasing some people!"

CHAPTER VI

SIC TRANSIT

Are you the new person drawn towards me?
To begin with take warning, I am surely far different from what you
suppose.

WALT WHITMAN.

ON a cold morning in July, 1913, Lettice climbed down from a Belgian third-class carriage, dragging her luggage behind her, and found herself at Graide station, province of Luxemburg. Lettice was an expert in the art of traveling cheaply. She had left Victoria the previous afternoon, in a slow train, because the boat expresses don't take third-class passengers. After a wait at Dover, she had crossed by night in the fetid atmosphere of the second-class ladies' cabin of the old *Rapide*, and had been excessively ill. Continuing her journey at 4 A.M., she had traveled to Brussels in a smoking compartment with all the windows shut. Namur, Dinant, Houyet—she lost count of her changes after that. Sometimes she faced the engine; more often she had to ride back; once a Belgian *père de famille* marched across the width of the carriage and ruthlessly pulled up the window, her window, under her very nose. Always somebody was smoking, to the usual accompaniments, under the notice "Niet Rookten"; and always, at every change, she had to drag her heavy basket down steps and across lines of rail and heave it up to racks far above her aching head. We buy our pleasures dear when we are young. But this was the end. At Graide she was to meet the diligence which should land her at the doors of the Hôtel Bellevue.

Of course there was no porter. In those days there never were any porters at a Belgian country station. If you didn't *expédier* your baggage (as every self-respecting

traveler should), you had to carry it yourself. Lettice's baggage was what is known as a pilgrim basket, gone at the corners, with a double strap which had slipped into a string round its middle, leaving the ends bulging. Bending to it like a patient donkey, she trailed across the loose gray gravel to the exit, and at last was outside in the road. The Café de la Gare confronted her, a yellow house with red facings and a blue slate roof. "Bureau de la diligence" appeared on its sign, but the customary shabby, dirty, stuffy, rickety ruin of a two-horse shandrydan was nowhere to be seen.

"Pour Rochehaut, madame?"

A smart commissionaire had seized her basket. Round his cap in gilt lettering ran the words, "Hôtel Bellevue." Lettice nodded distrustfully, and in a trice was whisked round the corner, still clinging to her strap. Behold the diligence of the Hôtel Bellevue — a brand-new motor char-à-banc, glistening in tan-colored varnish! The commissionaire threw open the door with a flourish worthy of the boulevards, and Lettice subsided in a corner as if her patient knees had at last given way.

In the fresh air she presently revived enough to take notice of her fellow-travelers. There were two, both women, the elder obviously a maid. Lettice had seen them before, at Dinant, descending from a *voiture-salon* with a porter in attendance, and had marked them with a malevolent eye, having tried in vain to secure that porter herself. But even without that memory she would have noticed the younger of the two.

She was a tall slip of a girl, scarcely out of her teens, but not dressed like an *ingénue*. Her French hat, her furs, her gloves, the exquisite cloth of her suit, all her traveling appointments might have belonged to a married woman of thirty. Yet she was not married, for there was no wedding ring among the diamonds on her finger, and Lettice, whose eyes were as good as opera-glasses, could read the label on the gold-mounted dressing-case in the rack above her head — Miss D. M. O'Connor, Hôtel Bellevue. She looked fragile,

as if recovering from an illness, and her figure was still slender and undeveloped; but she had masses of exquisitely glossy dark hair, and great dark eyes, full of fire and gloom. Young though she was, she knew how to get herself obeyed. When she scowled (and she could scowl, with those black brows), even a Belgian porter came to attention. Lettice was wondering what it was that had set her at odds with the world, and written such bitterness on the small, brooding face, when the dark eyes looked up and met hers with a smile, sudden and child-like, which had just the effect of a sunburst over a gloomy landscape.

But before she could speak the unsociable Lettice hurriedly averted her eyes and blotted herself in her corner. She make talk with a stranger for an hour, and begin an acquaintance which would have to be continued, with smiles and remarks about the weather, every time they chanced to meet in the hotel? No, thank you! The most interesting character study was not worth that. Lettice would have walked a couple of miles any day to avoid a chance acquaintance.

Miss O'Connor stared, half incredulous; then the clouds came down again with a vengeance, and she turned her back on the ungrateful Lettice and looked out of the window. They were passing down a straight road between long strips of arable land, wheat, potatoes, cabbages, beets, fenceless and flat as a table; and with the road went an avenue of trees, each lopped to a mop-head atop of its naked stem, crawling away like a green caterpillar to the limit of sight. In the distance a tiny white church raised a gray conical spire like an extinguisher; a group of white and gray dolls'-houses clustered below, drowsily basking, blue haze and brown dust, under the hazy sky.

"Louisa! What time do we get to Rochehaut?"

"Half-past twelve the book said, Miss Dot."

"Which means half-past one, I suppose," said Dorothea O'Connor in her caustic young voice. They were speaking in undertones, but Lettice, whose ears were as sharp as her eyes, could not help hearing every word. "This is the

most hatefully ugly place I've ever seen. Of course one expects advertisements to lie, but there is such a thing as overdoing it."

When Dorothea was annoyed, she let it be known. Louisa, faithful soul, bowed her head before the storm; but she paid about as much attention as to the rages of a child.

"Oh, Miss Dot dear, I wish you'd leave this dreadful heathen country and come back to England!"

"I'm coming back to England when I've done what I want, and not before." There was a pleasing vigor and directness in Dorothea's statements. "I'm sorry for you, Louisa, but after all you'll be able to get a cup of real English tea at the Bellevue — all the advertisements said so!"

"'Tisn't tea I'm thinking of, Miss Dot, but this dreadful wicked idea of yours. Deceiving your dear kind uncle and all —"

"It's no business of Uncle Jack's what I do, and if I don't tell him it's only because I don't want him to be bothered." Louisa sighed and shook her head. "I won't be moaned at," Dorothea declared, with an inimical flash. "No, and I won't be prayed at either! I've told you, you can go home if you like; but if you stay, you'll just have to resign yourself, because I *am* going through with it — I should despise myself for ever and ever if I didn't! There: is that plain?"

"Oh, Miss Dot, you have shook your hat so crooked!" was Louisa's earnest reply. Dorothea laughed, as she submitted to have it set straight.

"I rather hate you sometimes, Louisa darling, you make me feel such a brute," she said, "but I'm going on, all the same. Dear me, is this place an example of the unsurpassed view, I wonder? It'll add a fresh joy to Rochehaut if there's an outbreak of typhoid!"

They were passing through the village which in the distance had looked so trim. Set well back from the road on either side was a row of white houses; before each house, a midden, foursquare; before the middens, a gutter, running auburn; between the gutters, the main street, down which

the omnibus had to pass. Dorothea, her face buried in her handkerchief, was rummaging her bag impatiently for a bottle of lavender salts, when something made her glance at her fellow-traveler. Lettice was no longer gray, she was green, and trying weakly to unfasten her veil. Suddenly her surprised and unyielding waist was clasped by a peremptory arm, and the lavender salts were thrust under her nose.

"How many hatpins have you?—oh, here's the last. Move my things off the seat, Louisa. Now put your head down on these rugs; that's better. We shall be out of this hateful village directly."

The amazed Lettice found herself laid flat on the cushions. Automatically she rose up, reacting like a bent twig; instantly she was pressed back again.

"No, you must lie still. I saw you at Brussels, looking as ill as ill, even then. Are you ill, or is it only the traveling that's upset you?"

"I had a bad crossing," said Lettice, in a tone that was almost surly.

"A bad crossing? You came over last night? Then I don't wonder at anything. My flask, Louisa—no, that's the eau-de-Cologne, how stupid you are! I'm going to give you a liqueur; brandy's hateful, and no good at all, but a curaçao does pull you together. Open your mouth—that's right—"

Lettice had opened her mouth to say she did not like liqueurs, but she was given no time; her zealous nurse immediately poured the dose down her throat. This was an outrage—it was forcible feeding—and on Lettice, of all people! Lettice, who could not bear so much as to be touched against her will! Coughing in the most lady-like way, pink with choking and with injured dignity, she presented a pathetic sight for any one with eyes to see. Dorothea had none.

"You aren't one bit fit to be going about alone and looking after yourself," she said, in a mixture of severity and solicitude. "You ought to be in bed! Are you cold?—why, your hands are like lumps of ice! My cloak, Louisa.

When we get to the hotel you shall have a hot bottle and I'll see after you properly. No, don't try to talk."

Hitherto Lettice had expressed no gratitude, but now, having been told to keep silence, she said "Thank you," in a tone of acid obstinacy. It is trying to be done good to against your will. Nobody had ever before attempted such a liberty with Lettice. Denis might lecture, but he never dreamed of enforcing his advice; while her own sisters would have laughed at the possibility. "Make Lettice do what she doesn't choose?" cried Rosabel. "You might just as well argue with the leg of that table!"

Lettice, of course, did not agree with them; she considered herself to be of a yielding disposition, bordering on flabbiness; but there are things the meekest cannot stand. The moment Dorothea's back was turned she rose up and put on her hat again. After that she felt happier, if less comfortable. Lettice was one of those persons who are never really happy when they are comfortable; instinctive dread of slackness (springing by rebound from innate love of luxury) drove her to deny her body in order to ease her soul. Certainly her body was not at ease. Violent remedies did not suit her. It might have been the curaçao, or the insult, or both of them together, but her sensations were growing acute.

She saw nothing when they plunged into a rick dark green valley of woods. She was blind to the silvery splendors of distant hills and river. They turned into a wide courtyard and drew up. Lettice saw only that the Hôtel Bellevue had many piazzas and balconies, all full of people, all watching the arrival of the coach. Dorothea descended on one side. Her patient slipped out on the other and made towards the door.

"Why, Lettice!"

It was Denis, who had sprung out of his chair and was advancing towards her, smiling, as the phrase goes, all over his face. Lettice, while wishing him at Jericho, produced an answering smile.

"Well," said she.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming? You said you meant to spend the night in Brussels! You might have sent a wire!"

"I forgot," said Lettice, still edging towards the door. She wished he would not stand directly in the way. Denis at last began to perceive that something was wrong.

"Did you have a bad crossing? You're all the colors of the rainbow, my dear girl —"

Lettice suddenly swerved past him and almost ran towards the house. As she reached the door another dense and solid person came out, and got hopelessly in the way. A delay at such a moment . . . well, if it had been anybody in the world but Lettice . . . and even as it was . . .

"Good Lord!" said Denis.

The new-comer, who was Harry Gardiner, turned with commendable presence of mind and rang for a maid. "Show this lady to her room —"

"And take her a cup of tea at once," finished Dorothea, coming up breathless to resume command. "I'll see to her myself in a moment."

Lettice's last thought, as she hid her shame within the house, was that she must on no account forget to lock her door.

CHAPTER VII

AUBADE

Why should a heart have been there,
In the way of a fair woman's foot?

E. B. BROWNING.

THE house was asleep. The white corridor was filled with blue reflections of the sky, from the French window open at its north end; but the blind of the south window opposite glowed golden, and streaks of sunlight slipped in, slanting up the wall. The house was asleep, every one was asleep except the sun, who had just risen to his beneficent work, rejoicing as a giant to run his course. Denis's kitten (he had saved her from some boys who wanted to drown her in the river) poked her small black inquiring nose round the glass door, and scampered in to play with the vine-leaf shadows dancing on the wall. She patted them with velvet paw, crouched with tail lashing for a spring, reared up and fell over sideways and scuffled round and round on her back, clawing and biting her own tail.

There Gardiner saw her when he too came in from the balcony, walking in his socks and carrying his wading boots. He scooped her up in one hand and bore her down the corridor to Denis's room. No one answering his tap, he walked in. A small white chamber, facing west; the curtain drawn back from the open lattice, and Denis lying asleep beneath. Everything about him was sternly neat. His clothes were folded on a chair, his boots stood side by side, his Bible and Prayer Book lay on the window-ledge at the bed's head. The wind had blown back the cover, and Gardiner stooped to read the inscription. "Denis Arthur Merion-Smith, from his Affectionate Father, March 4,

1897"—the date of his confirmation. Underneath, the reference 1 Tim. v. 22. Gardiner with unscrupulous curiosity turned the pages till he found the verse, underscored: "Keep thyself pure." He stood looking at his friend's unconscious face with something of envy. He was never in doubt as to the relative worth of himself and Denis.

"Mrrreow!" said the kitten, suddenly biting and kicking in earnest. Gardiner dropped her on the sleeper, and laughed to see his violent start.

"Come on fishing, lazy brute!"

"What, now?" asked Denis, rubbing his eyes and soothing the kitten at the same time.

"Yes, now, pronto, this instant. I've wasted the prime of the morning already, because I knew I shouldn't be able to drag you out of your bed before."

"All right, I'm on," said Denis with disarming amiability. Gardiner left him feeding the kitten with biscuits, and went down to his larders, which he knew as well as any careful housewife. He secured some of yesterday's croissants, butter in a china pot, sliced ham, half-a-dozen shrimp patties, a pocketful of pears; he boiled up coffee on an electric stove to fill his flask, and was ready to join Denis in the courtyard.

Just after four: the morning blue and gold and breathless still. They came into the road which runs embanked along the heights of Rochehaut, and paused at the parapet. Deep the cleft of the valley, rich in forests, dropping sheer to the river—and what a river! The Semois, on a map, looks like a dislocated corkscrew; she twists and she turns, tying herself into S's and W's, running impartially north, south, east, and west among her maze of hills. Here at the foot of the cliffs of Rochehaut she sweeps a long loop at the beholder, inclosing in her slender silver arms a long, long narrow peninsula of hills which swell up to end in a rounded baby mountain immediately below. This is Frahan. The ends of the loop run far away out of sight among the hills, incurving so that you would swear they must meet somewhere in the chaos of dim peaks on the horizon. The sun from behind the watchers was faintly gilding the velvety

gray-green crest of the peninsula, and the tiny church of Frahan, on its flank, gleamed like an ivory toy; but the river cleft was still deep in hyacinthine shadows, veiled in the gauzes of the mists, drenched with the gray-silver of the dews.

The fishermen found a winding path which led them to the river, and turned down-stream, fishing and wading. Of all the lovely daughters of the Meuse the Semois is the loveliest. The Lesse, issuing cold and mysterious from the caverns of Han, has been insulted by a railway; the Amblève is gloomy with dark bowlders and wild monotonous hills; the turbulent Ourthe, beautiful among the mountains in the ravine of Sy, is elsewhere spoilt by quarries and by tourists. But the Semois is never gloomy; she seems to hold the sunshine in her golden sands. You may follow her wriggings for a whole morning and see no road, no tilth, no sign of human handiwork save the very primitive cart track which conducts you impartially beside the water and through it.

A slab of rock, embedded in the turf, served as their breakfast-table. A wall of limestone rose behind, graced with ferns and mosses and the delicate carmine leaflets of the wild geranium. Fallen bowlders shelved half across the stream, which surged round them in a ruff, or slid past like thin crystal. What richness of color everywhere! They could see the river dancing towards them down the green and smiling valley, bluer than the sky, a-sparkle with diamonds, beset with flowers — forget-me-nots, the tender lilac crocus of the autumn, yellow lilies on a pool where the Semois condescended for a moment to lie still. The woods were green as sycamores in May. A kingfisher swept by, tropically brilliant. On the purple mint at the water's edge a great butterfly sat poised, pivoting round the flower-head, stiffly opening and closing its gorgeous, downy wings of scarlet, black, and white.

"Talk to me of your beastly England!" said Gardiner, flat on his back in the grass. "A man can breathe here. Look at those trees — none of your spindly copses with the sky showing through on the other side, but good solid cut-

and-come-again forest, for leagues on end! I could say my prayers to a forest."

"It's good fishin'," said Denis, more intent on his catch than on the scenery. The Ourthe may brag of its salmon, but the Semois has noble trout. "Better than it was at Grasmere."

"Oh, Grasmere. . . ."

Gardiner's face was not expressive, but his voice told Denis that he was back among scenes which by common consent they had not mentioned before, and which Denis had no wish ever to mention again. He saw what he had brought on himself, and blessed his blundering tongue. Sure enough, after some pause the younger man asked:

"Did you ever hear any more of Mrs. Trent after I left?"

"A little, from Scott," Denis unwillingly admitted.

"From Scott? Did he write to you, then?"

"No, I saw him."

"Where? In town?"

"At Westby."

"You saw Scott at *Westby*?"

"I spent a week-end with him there last November," said Denis stiffly. "He asked me when we were at Easedale. He's a nice little chap. I like him."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Gardiner, settling back his head, which he had lifted to stare at his friend. "You talk too much about your own affairs, Denis, that's what's the matter with you. Go on. What did he tell you about Mrs. Trent?"

"He said she'd not made at all a good recovery; after leavin' Easedale she'd to go to a nursing home in town, and from there she sent him down a cross and candlesticks for the prison chapel. Scott was quite set up about it, he's a ritualistic little chap; and I suppose they were handsome enough if you like such things, I don't —"

"My good Denis, what have I to do with crosses and candlesticks? Did he say she said anything about me?"

"He did," said Denis, more unwillingly than ever. "He said she asked for your address."

"Oh, confound —! Did he give it?"

"He had to. He said it was no use refusin', as she'd easily have got it out of any one else."

"He said that, did he? Confound him too! I seem to have left several loose ends over this affair. Was that all he told you?"

"Yes. After she wrote with the things he heard no more."

"I wonder why she wanted my address," said Gardiner, frowning. "Well, I suppose it must be all right — after all this time."

He pulled at his pipe in silence. Happening to glance at Denis, he surprised that look of distaste and repugnance which he had never seen on his friend's face before Easedale. Gardiner was not fond of owning himself in the wrong; few men are, and he less than most. But he spoke out now on impulse.

"Look here, Denis, I know very well I ought to have owned up. I knew it at the time, but I was too beastly scared! — and that's the plain truth. It was the idea of prison; for the moment it knocked all the stuffing out of me — you needn't think I admire myself. And to drag you into it as well — oh, it was a rotten business!"

"You didn't drag me, I dragged myself," said Denis quickly. "If anybiddy was to blame, it was I."

"You! You'll be telling me you killed him next. No, it's my own funeral — and I've been such a concentrated ass over it, that's what gets me! If I'd told the truth at once, there would have been practically no bother, I'm certain of it. I could have done it then; afterwards, at the inquest, when I wanted to, it was too late. I couldn't tell the tale without its point; and I couldn't tell that particular point when that unhappy little thing had lost both her husband and her kid. No, I don't consider myself to shine in this affair, either in morals or intelligence."

"It was I began it," said Denis obstinately.

Gardiner shrugged his shoulders; what was the use of contradiction? Denis was mending a fly; and by the happy

clearing of his face it was plain that he was also busy mending his ideal and setting it back on its pedestal with an added glory. There is no surer way of earning a man's esteem than by begging his pardon. All Gardiner's faults were hidden under this new coat of gilding. "You're an incurable idealist, my good Denis," he said to himself, watching the process of rehabilitation. "You idealize me on the one hand, and that inoffensive but very ordinary little cousin of yours on the other. Lord send you never find us out, for you'll break your knees badly when you do!" The undeserved good opinion of a friend makes a thorny bed. Yet, though Gardiner did not see it, he was moving towards the fulfillment of his friend's conception of his character. That is the worst of idealists — they shame us into acting up to their ideas!

Denis was a devout fisherman. As soon as he had finished the fly he started off again, wading round the bend out of sight. Gardiner, who fished only because any sport was better than none, stayed where he was. Minutes passed. He was nearly asleep when some one hailed him. At first he thought it was Denis, and took no notice; but the voice becoming insistent, he opened one eye, and immediately sprang up. It was Miss O'Connor, on the other side of the river.

She made a trumpet of her hands and shouted some question, but the Semois drowned her words. Gardiner was wearing the orthodox Ardennes waders, which begin as boots and continue as shiny waterproof breeches right up to the waist, so it was nothing for him to splash across to the farther shore. (It may be mentioned that Denis stuck obstinately to his English boots, which came scarcely higher than his knee; with the result that he got very wet, for the Semois came considerably higher than his knee.)

Dorothea was wearing a short tweed skirt with leather buttons; square-toed, solid brown brogues; a white shirt, a tan belt, and a brown tie to match. She was hatless, and her hair, smooth, parted, and rippling over her ears, was glossy as a Frenchwoman's. Her face, which had lost its

fragility, was softly, evenly brown; her lips, a veritable cupid's bow, were cherry-red. They were drawn straight as she looked at Gardiner, and her manner was distant.

"I took you for a woodcutter, or I should not have disturbed you," she said. "I wished to ask if there is a way back along the river."

"Well, there is," said Gardiner, looking down at the ruts under their feet, "and you're on it. If you follow this track, it will bring you straight to Rochehaut."

"But it goes through the water."

"It does."

"Must I go through the water, then?"

"Unless you like to make a bee-line up through the forest to Botassart. It's nearly perpendicular, and miles out of your way."

"Very inconvenient," said Dorothea displeasedly. "Why isn't there a ferry?"

"Well, you see this track isn't much used, except by the timber wagons. It won't be above your knees, if you'll allow me to show you the way; this is a regular ford. But perhaps you'd rather I retired round the bend?"

"That will not be necessary," she said, more frigidly than ever, and without more ado went behind a bush to take off her shoes and stockings. Gardiner thought her very pretty and rather ridiculous, and wondered if he were called on to see her home. He decided that he was not. It occurred to him that by all the laws of romance he ought to carry her across; but he decided again that nature had not cut him out for the part. No true hero should be half-an-inch shorter than the heroine; and certainly none has ever been known to drop a lady in the middle of a river.

Dorothea appeared barefoot, and motioned him imperiously to lead the way. They stepped into the clear, shallow water, scattering a cloud of tiny fishes. As they advanced, Dorothea's skirts bunched up higher and higher. If Gardiner had not kept his eyes delicately averted, he might have had a glimpse, and more than a glimpse, of certain tweed garments that were not a part of her skirt. The

Semois, though shallow, is very swift. Midway across the golden pebbles were succeeded by slabs of gray-green rock, tressed with weed. Gardiner heard a small exclamation, and turned just in time to save his companion from measuring her length in the river. His arm went round the slim figure, so soft and pliant, with no more sentiment than if it had been a boy. But she — her color flamed as she was thrown against him; she dropped her skirts and clutched his arm to push him away.

"Steady!" said Gardiner, "or you'll have us both over. These stones are as slippery as glass."

"I — trod on something sharp," said Dorothea in a strangled voice. She stood there with her skirts in the water, still holding him off with both hands.

"Hurt yourself?"

She shook her head.

"Sure? Will you take my arm for a bit?" said Gardiner, puzzled by her unaccountable emotion.

She shook her head again, and stumbled after him to the shore. There she sat down on the stone which had been their table, to put on her shoes and stockings while he collected his possessions. He gave her plenty of time, as he thought, yet when he turned she was still sitting there, with one foot bare on the grass. Across the instep, blanched alabaster white by the water, ran a crimson gash.

"Hullo! you have damaged yourself," said Gardiner. "You ought to have something between that and the stocking, if you'll allow me to say so. Got a handkerchief?"

"I've lost it," she said without looking up.

"Have mine, then." He held it out; she made no movement. "May I do it for you?"

After a brief incomprehensible hesitation, she murmured: "Please." More and more puzzled, Gardiner knelt down and took her foot in his hand. It was a bad cut, but not very bad; some women would have made nothing of it; he was glad she belonged to the more feminine type. He washed away the gravel and fixed a neat bandage, Dorothea sitting passive. But he could feel that she was conscious

of him; and he became acutely conscious of her. When it was done, she murmured something which might have been supposed to be thanks, slipped half her foot into her shoe and stood up.

"You'll never get home at that rate. Let me help you," said Gardiner, watching her attempt to shuffle along.

"I — I think I can manage. Is it far?"

"Twenty minutes' walk, and shocking bad going."

"I shall be taking you out of your way."

"Not a bit of it. It's time I got back too."

"But your friend — I saw him fishing up the stream."

"Oh, he's old enough to play by himself," said Gardiner easily, his keenness growing in proportion to her reluctance. (It may be said that Denis, when he returned, spent half-an-hour hunting for his friend before he decided to follow him home. Thus does Love elbow Friendship out of the way.) "Don't you want me to help you?" he added bluntly. "Do you object to me personally? Shall I cut on home and send your maid?"

"Oh, no, no," said Dorothea hurriedly, and thereupon took his arm. Gardiner had what he wanted, and a little more; heavens! what was the matter with the girl? She was shaking all over, an electric battery of emotion; the strong current of her trouble and indecision thrilled him in every nerve. More than that, he was left in no doubt that he himself was the cause of her agitation.

There was nothing of the ascetic in Gardiner; he was warm-blooded and inflammable, as he had already found to his cost. Since he could not get away from his temperament, he got round it, by avoiding women, and by keeping any necessary intercourse free from the first beginnings of sentiment. As his will was stronger than his passions, except when they got out of hand and were running away, this plan had worked well. But he could not avoid Dorothea; and when she slipped her hand through his arm she undid the work of years, and stirred ashes into flame. Passion, unlike love, is a sudden growth, and it was passion he felt: that inexplicable force which draws men and women to-

gether, often in defiance of every natural taste and sentiment. The situation was alluring. Dorothea was not merely a pretty girl, she was a personage, as she had very soon made known in the hotel; a star far away in the sky above Gardiner's head. Yet the touch of his hand set her shaking like a reed. Gardiner was not coxcomb enough to imagine that she had fallen in love with his fine eyes; but he was prepared to stake his soul that for some undiscoverable reason she was half afraid of him. What man could resist that lure?

It was not a long journey to the Bellevue, but it was eventful; for things move fast in the campaigns of the heart. Gardiner did not capitulate without a struggle. "You ass, you don't want an affair of this sort on your hands, particularly not with one of your own boarders," he told himself. "You preposterous ass, go slow!" And paid as much heed as men in such circumstances usually do to their own wisdom. "I can resist everything except temptation" — the phrase flitted ruefully through his mind. He was trying hard to convince himself that Dorothea's tremors were not necessarily flattering, when they came out of the woods into the road, in view of the hotel.

Dorothea stood still.

"I — I think I'd rather manage the rest alone, if you don't mind."

Gardiner started, dropped her arm, stepped back out of sight among the trees.

"Of course. You naturally would. I ought to have understood before."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!"

"Oh, I think you did. It would hardly do, would it?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Dorothea. She hesitated; he could see her visibly struggling with herself; then she raised her head. Whatever quinine of common-sense he might administer to himself, there was no possibility of mistaking the expression in those pansy-brown eyes. She might have wavered before; she had made up her mind now.

"I *didn't* mean that," she said. "I never thought of such

a thing. It was only that — that — people do talk, if they see things — and suppose you asked me to go for a walk with you again —”

“Do you mean that if I did, you would?”

He got no answer. Lettice had just come out to the gates of the hotel to taste the morning sun, with the kitten squirming on her shoulder; and at sight of her Miss O'Connor ran away.

CHAPTER VIII

AMANDUS, -A, -UM

"Mine is a long and a sad tale," said the Mouse, sighing.

THE Bellevue, when Gardiner first set eyes on it, was a cross between a hostelry and a farm, tumbled round three sides of a quadrangle where black-and-white pigs rooted and grunted, among middens and mangy grass, under the windows of the dining-room. The Ardennes hotel of those days had no drains, no baths, no basins bigger than soup-plates and not many towels, no easy-chairs, no salons; in fact, none of the comforts of a refined home. There would be middens outside and the odor of the cow-stable within. On the other hand, the rooms would be clean, the beds comfortable, the food abundant, if peculiar; and the friendly welcome which met the traveler made up for many discomforts.

In all his former ventures Gardiner had been a tenant; the Bellevue was his own. He had bought the freehold with an opportune legacy, and was spending on it his savings of ten years. According to his usual plan, he went to work first to make the outside attractive. The quadrangle where the pigs had fed was now a lawn, laid out with flower-beds. Of the dilapidated out-buildings, some had been pulled down, others built up and turned into additional bedrooms. Round the three sides of the court ran a piazza with easy-chairs, and tables, and ever more flowers, sure attraction to an English eye. Inside, his alterations had been more costly. He had put in baths; he had laid on electric light; he had partially refurnished the house—not, however, with conventional "suites" from Liège. They would not have suited the heterogeneous old mansion, on whose lintel was

carved the date 1548, and which had been successively convent, country house, farm, and inn. For those who had eyes to see, there was in those days a good deal of fine old furniture, carved presses, beds, and so forth, to be picked up in the farms and the villages. It had been a labor of love for Gardiner to go round bargaining for these things, and bringing them home in triumph to his picturesque old rooms. He made a play of his work, and a pet of his home; he grudged no labor spent in beautifying it; he enjoyed dressing it up, as a child dresses up a doll. In the end, what with polished floors, casement curtains, and Noah's Ark plants in pots, the place looked like a garden-city house, as Lettice unkindly remarked. There was nothing like it in the Ardennes.

His next step was to advertise, a branch of their business on which hotel-keepers in general do not seem to spend their brains. Gardiner did not want a mixed clientèle, he was out to attract the poorer gentry, parsons, doctors, schoolmasters, retired colonels and commanders, literary men — the class which he had found pleasantest to deal with. Therefore he put his discreet little paragraphs into such papers as *The Guardian*, *The Church Times*, *The Author*, *The Journal of Education*, *The Spectator*, and various ladies' periodicals. Each advertisement was worded differently, to suit its audience, but all wound up with the formula: "Inclusive terms, 4s. 6d. per day. Fifteen-day excursions, Dover — Rochehaut, second class, £1. 8s. 3d. Exact directions as to journey given." And to meet the demand which arose, he had leaflets printed, giving alternative routes by day or night, plans of stations, prices in detail, travel hints, the minute advice of an old traveler who knows every trick of the journey; leaflets which enabled the greenest novice to face the *douane*, and change at the right places, and catch the right trains. This branch of his work alone kept him busy, for he was his own secretary. But it gained him what he wanted, and filled his house. Satan had not much chance of finding Gardiner's hands at his disposal. Nevertheless, in those summer days he found time to get into mischief.

Lettice was enjoying herself very much in her own fashion, though to more adventurous souls her daily round might have seemed dull. She came down to breakfast at nine, and then crawled out half-a-mile to a certain brush-wood pile in the forest, commanding the view over Frahan. There she sat down, the faggots providing a comfortable seat with a back. She took a work-bag and a Latin grammar, and spent her morning alternately in setting slow stitches in a green tablecloth and in learning Latin verbs from the volume open on her knee. After lunch she retired to her room in company with a sheaf of foolscap. If she wrung out one whole line in a day, she considered herself to have done brilliantly. After tea came a solemn constitutional with Denis, which, as her chronic tiredness wore off, extended from two miles to six, or even ten. Then followed dinner; and after dinner, bed at nine o'clock.

One morning about three weeks after her arrival she was starting on her customary crawl to the wood pile, when Dorothea jumped up from her seat on the *terrasse*.

"Are you going for a walk? May I come too?"

"I'm not going far," Lettice warned her in a discouraging hurry.

"I know; you go into the woods and sit down, don't you? I'll bring my book."

"That will be very nice," declared Lettice. Any one who knew the A B C of her expressions must have seen that she was, to put it prettily, as cross as two sticks. Dorothea was not blind; nevertheless, she persisted. They walked in silence, Dorothea now a little ahead, now checking herself back to her companion's unalterable crawl. Arrived at the wood pile, Lettice sat down on the identical bundle of sticks which she had picked out for herself seventeen days before. She was conservative as a cat in all her ways.

The morning was hazy. Round them the woods had been cleared of forest trees; there was a carpet of reddish leathery leaves, across which the great silver boles lay forlorn, amid the white chips of their slaughter. Low bushes were green, and there were leaves overhead, a thin tracery; but else-

where only russet tones and gray, gray-stemmed saplings and grayish mists. Gray too was Frahan in the valley, softly molded in haze, white the river circling its utterly improbable peninsula, gray the far mountains, pearl-gray and silver, losing themselves in silvery sky. Between her participles and her stitches Lettice would often lift up her eyes to the hills; she dearly loved a distant view. But to-day she was watching her companion.

Dorothea had plumped down among the withered leaves and sat there, hugging her knees and staring gloomily into the forest. To the feminine eye it was plain that she wore no stays; she bent about like a willow wand, and her attitudes were unstudied as a child's. Youth is often tragic; but there was real bitter experience written on those soft childish contours, and it was the contradiction which interested Lettice. Turning her head suddenly, Dorothea caught her with her needle suspended, staring, and broke into her charming smile.

"I want to tell you something about myself; may I?"

Lettice instantly became all attention. Nature had designed her as a casket for confidences, and they were often poured into her patient ear. Dorothea uncurled herself and lay prone, snuggling close, propping her chin in her hands, and looking now on the ground, now up at Lettice with her big soft eyes.

"It's a long tale, but it's really quite funny," she said. "It all began about money. There was a family place, and my father, when he died, left it to me, with his brother as my guardian; but the brother, my uncle, thought it ought to have been left to him direct, do you see? — not to a scrap of a girl. So he was very angry and always bore me a grudge, and I do think he had a sort of grievance, only he needn't have been so horrid about it. He wouldn't have been so bad but for his wife. She was a clever woman, and he was a big soft handsome booby who always believed what she told him; so when she said I was sly and wicked, of course he was sure I was. Well, I lived with them, and they had the use of my money. But they were always most

desperately afraid I should get married and take it away. So they wouldn't let me go anywhere. I never went to a dance, I never played tennis, I wasn't even let go out to tea or have any girl friends, not after I was fourteen. Clara (that's what I had to call her) used to go up to town, and shop in Bond Street, and do the round of the theaters, on *my* money, while I was left at home to dust the drawing-room and wash the stockings. It was funny! Just like Cinderella!"

"Why didn't you run away?"

"I hadn't any money except threepence a week, or any one to run to. Besides—" She hesitated. "You don't know how helpless a girl can be in the hands of a grown-up man," she said, with resurgent bitterness. "He used to tell me I was the sort of girl who makes a man want to thrash her. He did hit me once or twice. Oh! I could have killed him!"

She stabbed the dead leaves viciously with Lettice's scissors.

"But, but—but didn't people talk?" Lettice asked.

"Yes, they did, and some of them even quarreled with my uncle about me; but you see he told every one what a bad girl I was, and in a way it wasn't a lie, and he could make people believe it, because he believed it himself. He did really believe that I'd made father leave the money to me, though I was only five when he died. Why, sometimes I even got muddled myself, and used to feel I must be all the dreadful things he said. Oh! I was miserable. You can be very, very miserable when you're seventeen, and it doesn't seem a bit funny then. I remember once I saved up my pennies and retrimmed my summer hat—I always hated the things she got for me—and made it look quite pretty. I was so pleased with it; and then when I came down she said it was unsuitable, and she made me take it off, and go to church in the horrid old brown felt I'd worn all the winter, though it was a broiling June day! I cried—I cried all the service. So to punish me, when we came out, she asked the vicar, me standing by, to change our pew, because she

said she couldn't trust me so near the choir! (That was one of the things they always said, that I ran after men.) However, she was done that time, for the vicar played up like a trump. He said he'd speak to the choir, and see they didn't annoy me again; and then he turned to me and paid the dearest old-fashioned compliment about my sweet face being enough to turn any young man's head — and me in that frightful old hat and my nose swelled purple with crying!" She burst out laughing.

"But you did get away at last?"

"Yes, I did. I found a friend to help me . . . but I can't talk about that." Visibly, under Lettice's eyes, her face clouded over and changed. It was a significant change: not a mere shadow falling from without, but a revolution within. The under side of her nature, black with premature grief and premature passions, slowly turned its ugliness into view.

"Did you ever hate any one?" she asked, her voice sinking and her eyes glowing as she relived the feelings she described. "Did you ever know what it was to turn sick and cold with loathing, to have the world go black, *black*, when a certain person comes near? Did you? No, I know you never did, you're far too good a Christian. But I'm not a Christian. I don't believe in any religion of love. There's little enough love here, and what there is goes to the wall. And there's no love over us; just a cruel, cruel, grinding power, which delights in breaking to bits whatever it sees that's beautiful and happy. Oh, it's an ugly, cruel, hateful world!"

"I think it's a very nice world," said Lettice, her words falling like drops of soft water on white-hot steel. They did not very accurately reflect her thoughts, but Lettice's words seldom did that. Dorothea laughed them to scorn.

"You wouldn't if you were in my shoes," she said desisively. She sat up. "Listen, and I'll tell you if you like. You've just heard what sort of life I had when I was a girl; I can laugh over it now, but it wasn't very gay at the time. Well, I got away, as I said; and for a little I was happy —

oh, I *was* — for just a little, little while. And then, in a moment — everything gone. Everything. All I'd cared for, and the hopes I had — oh, I had, I had such heavenly hopes — all gone, all broken, dead, dead, dead." She beat her palm on the ground. "I dare say if I'd been older I might have taken it better," she said, turning her eyes on Lettice with an appeal which nothing in earth or heaven could satisfy; for it was an appeal to the Moving Finger to go back, to reverse what had been written. "I might have been gentle and forgiving and resigned then. But I wasn't old enough. I'm only twenty-one now. And I'm tired — I'm tired."

The mournful vibrations of her voice died away.

"It is very tiring to hate anybody," said Lettice, deftly plucking the core of meaning out of these wild speeches. Dorothea did not seem to hear. Her eyes, transparent windows of her soul, were miserably sad. Presently with a quick sigh she roused herself, turned the key on memory and drew down the blind.

"There, that's enough about me. I didn't mean to tell you all this, but never mind, I'm glad you know. Now let's talk about something cheerful. Tell me about that handsome cousin of yours. What's he like?"

Lettice, who could not bear to see a book mishandled, had picked up Dorothea's, and was smoothing its rumpled pages. She accommodated herself with patience to this violent change of subject. "Denis?" she said. "He is very nice." Convenient word! In Lettice's vocabulary it covered a multitude of meanings.

"I like his face. He looks as if he were in the army. Is he in the army? What does he do?"

"He — he's a sort of engineer."

"An engineer? A civil engineer? That's not bad; they do do things worth doing — they and an explorer here and there, and the flying men — I like them best. I like courage, physical courage, it's far more interesting than moral. I shouldn't think your cousin would ever know what it was to feel afraid. And wouldn't he never tell a lie?"

"Never," said Lettice, her eyes straying to her Latin grammar.

"Not even to save a friend? He'd do anything else, take any risk himself, but just not that? So that if he was pushed into a corner he'd have to tell the truth? That's just what I should have expected. Of course there are a few things I have against him," Dorothea ran on, seemingly at random, though her downcast eyes were glowing. "He shouldn't like cats, nasty treacherous things, they're not a man's animal. And he shouldn't sing the hymns on Sunday out of that big book with tunes. Going to church is all right, and suits him, but I can't bear that book. It's like the W.S.P. A." Presumably Miss O'Connor meant the Y.M.C.A. "Mr Gardiner's his very greatest friend, isn't he? Would he tell lies, do you think?"

"I don't know," said Lettice, far down the passive voice of *amo*.

"What do you think of him?"

"I think he's very nice."

Out shot Dorothea's arm, and Lettice, amazed, aggrieved, found herself being vigorously shaken.

"Do *not* talk like that! I never in my life knew any one so — so perfectly systematically untruthful as you are! I don't believe you've once this morning said one single thing you really mean!" (But she was wrong, for Lettice had done so — once.) "Tell me what you think of Mr. Gardiner. *Tell* me. I want to know."

Lettice, chafing her arm, mutely reproachful, indicated the creases which Dorothea's grip had left on her pale blue linen sleeve. "You, you, you — you are so *violent*," she complained in her *pianissimo* drawl, which held always a hint of make-believe. "I don't know what you mean. I do think Mr. Gardiner is very nice." Then for the second time she let out a little piece of truth. "I shouldn't think he'd take failure well."

"Oh."

Abrupt silence. Dorothea sprang up and wandered off into the forest, slashing at the brambles with her stick,

jumping over logs that came in her way, just as a boy might have done. Indeed she looked like a boy in her rough tweeds and Norfolk coat, with her brown face and well-scratched hands. She had worn neither hat nor gloves since she came.

Lettice looked at her with shrewd and wideawake curiosity. She and Denis, pooling their observations, had been following the hidden course of Gardiner's love affair. So circumspectly had the pair behaved that not a soul in the hotel, except the two allies, had any inkling of the romance in progress. Yet it was serious enough, at any rate for Gardiner. He was in it up to the neck; no doubt about him. And Dorothea? Denis was of opinion that she meant business. Hadn't Lettice seen the expression (love-light was the word in his mind, but he didn't like to use it) in her eyes?

Lettice had always had her doubts as to that love-light, though she kept them to herself. This morning they had become certainty. Dorothea did not love Harry Gardiner — it was not love which had looked out of those too-clear eyes of hers when she asked that imperious question. No! Lettice had been illuminated by the certainty that he was the man whom, on her own showing, she had singled out to hate. Dorothea could hate, no doubt of that. The plain black and white of her emotions, love and hate, rapture and agony, they were somewhat startling in a world of neutral grays.

But at this point Lettice found herself up against a blank wall. What was Gardiner's offense, and how did it happen that he did not know it himself? For he did not know; and Dorothea was planning her attack against a man who had thrown away his armor for love of her. This was not sporting. Lettice always instinctively took sides with the weak against the strong, with the victim against the avenger. Besides, she liked Gardiner. She liked Dorothea too — with reservations; but her character was simpler, more homogeneous, easier to follow. She, in fact, was interesting historically, but not analytically. Now the uncertain balance

of strength and weakness in Gardiner made him an engrossing study. He was transparent to Lettice, while she was opaque to him. "That inoffensive but very ordinary little person"—so he had called her: what a pity he could not look into her mind!

Thus Lettice abandoned the study of the passive of *amo* for its active voice. In the midst of her cogitations she was surprised to see Denis come in view, striding through the bracken. He sometimes called for her on his way back from the river, but now he was approaching from the direction of the hotel. Moreover, gloom sat upon his brow.

"I say, Lettice," he called out, the Irish accent unusually strong, "isn't it a nawful nuisance? Wandesforde's had a smash-up in his car, and he wants me back at once!"

Lettice gazed at him, slowly and thoughtfully rubbing her nose.

"I got the wire just as I was startin' for the river. No, he's not bad, only a broken arm. But the nuisance of it is that he's entered for a race on Friday week, and he wants me to take it on instead. I hate racing on a Friday—I hate racing at all, for that matter, mixin' oneself up with newspaper men and that sort of raffle; but I'll have to do it."

"A race? What fun! What for?" asked Dorothea, coming up in time to hear the last words. She dropped down on a bundle of faggots, and extended under Lettice's nose a brown and purple palm full of blackberries. Lettice shook her head, slowly, twice. Dorothea, with a glint of fun, reached out to offer them to Denis. He screwed his eyeglass into place, gazed at them absently, and said: "No, thank you." Dorothea continued to wave them under his nose, in the manner of the importunate sidesman offering the plate to the stingy parishioner. Denis, yielding, still absently, chose a berry and swallowed it whole like a pill. Dorothea with a broad smile emptied the rest of her handful into her mouth, and hugged her knees again with her crimson hands. The whole had taken but a moment. "I didn't know you went in for racing. What did you say it was for?" she repeated.

"Silver trophy offered by the *Birmingham Courier*. Cross-country, with compulsory halts at Redditch, Coventry, Polesworth, and Wallsall. He'd scratch, if it weren't that we're both rather keen on testin' our new little bus. She's done one hundred and twenty and over on her trial flights —"

"Flights? It's an aeroplane race? You fly? You told me he was an engineer!" cried Dorothea, rounding on Lettice in hot reproach. "Why, I've been longing to meet a flying man for years! Go on, go on, tell me all about it. Do you fly much? How *idiotic* of me not to recognize your name!"

Here was the enthusiastic young lady, Denis's pet aversion; but, strange to say, he did not seem to mind her.

"Well, I build aeroplanes," he said, smiling. "It's my partner does the ornamental work. You may know his name — Wandesforde."

"Wandesforde? Sydney Wandesforde? Why, I should just think I do! He was the man who came in first in the London-Berlin race, and was disqualified for passing inside one of the controls in a fog. And then he had that marvelous escape, when his machine turned over in the air, and spilt him in a heap on the top plane, and he managed to regain control, and brought her down safely after all! Why, he's magnificent! I'd give — I'd give a thousand pounds to go up with him!"

"You can do it for less than that," said Denis, amused.

"Ah, but I mean in a race. A big flying race — it's about the one thrill worth having left in the world!"

"You should fly your own machine. That's better fun than bein' a passenger. Any one of the big schools would take you on, for a matter of seventy pounds or so. It's quite simple."

"Would they? Will you build me an aeroplane, if they do?"

"With pleasure, if you give me the commission."

"I shall come and see you about it directly I get back to England."

"Do."

Lettice gazed from one to the other. Dorothea was like a rose, her eyes were sparkling; Denis was amused and interested. True that at present he saw only the enthusiast, not the woman, but it was not to be supposed that he lacked the common instincts of human nature. Was this sudden friendship to be encouraged? Lettice answered that question by uprooting herself from her seat.

"It is one o'clock," she announced. "I am going home."

Denis, as her escort, rose too. Dorothea sat still, looking decidedly sulky.

"Aren't you coming, Miss O'Connor?"

"No. She doesn't want me to."

Lettice, who had already started on her homeward journey, obviously was not given to hear. Denis glanced, irresolute, from that expressive back to Dorothea, but ended by raising his cap and hastening after his cousin.

"I'm sorry we bored you," he said, taking possession of her coat and bag and book.

"Don't *mention* it," returned Lettice with polite *em-pressement*.

CHAPTER IX

MELODRAMATIC

Do one thing at least I can —
Love a man or hate a man
Supremely.

Pippa Passes.

"LOUISA!"

"Yes, Miss Dot?"

"Has either of those two recognized you?"

"Well, miss, Mr. Smith haven't, that's sure. I might be a sack of potatoes for all the notice he takes. Men he'll look at, and I'd be sorry to be the one as tried to do him; but women — no. He's a real gentleman, he is. He've taken his ticket for up above, and he ain't goin' to waste it."

"And the other one?"

"Mr. Gardiner? I see him stare at me pretty hard times and again, but it's always, 'Now, have I seen you before or haven't I?' so I just stares back as bold as a cucumber and puts him off. He can't be sure, see, about a old thing as is just like any other old thing. He've seen a many maids, miss."

"I never realized you were a danger till I'd got you here, and then it was too late. Never mind, you'll come in useful. Very useful. I didn't see how to begin, but I do now. I'm going to get it out of Gardiner himself if I possibly can, that's only fair; but if I can't, I can always fall back on Merion-Smith. You see, if I can only get either of them to make any sort of admission, it's all I need, and that murderer's under my thumb. Because Merion-Smith won't swear to a lie. Not even to save a friend — Lettice owned it this morning. At the inquest he escaped because nobody thought of asking him any questions, but once I get him into the

witness-box again — oh! I *must* make Gardiner speak — I *will*!”

“Miss, if you ’op about so I can’t do your hair, and I shall pull you crool.”

“Do I care?”

With a jerk and a tug, Dorothea dragged her long tresses out of Louisa’s hands, and buried her face on the dressing-table. Gaunt and patient, Louisa waited behind her chair. Her sympathies were divided; she found it hard to believe harm of a man, a mere bachelor man, who kept his house so scrupulously clean.

“It’s a wicked thing you’re after, miss, though I suppose it’s no use me saying so,” she remarked dispassionately.

“It is not wicked! It’s justice. That’s all I want: to make him answer to the law for what he’s done. I wouldn’t touch him with a pitchfork myself!”

“But look at the nasty underhanded way of it, miss! Mascarooning as if you wasn’t married, and you the way you been last year and all — it ain’t hardly decent, to my mind. It makes me sick to see him hangin’ on your foot-steps, so to speak, and you leadin’ him on. And it’s my belief it’s a wild mare’s nest you got in your head, and him a babe unborn all the time; and then where’ll you be?”

“Where I was before, of course. If it’s so I shall find it out, and no harm done.”

“No harm, with him trustin’ the very ground you tread on, and then coming all of a jolt on the truth —”

“Oh, I can’t go into all that,” said Dorothea impatiently. “I didn’t ask him to admire me, did I? It was he began it. I never dreamed of such a thing. Besides, I’m right, I know I am, and so would you if you’d been there. He did it. He’s accountable for two lives, and one of them so innocent, so innocent — You know what Guy did for me, what he saved me from; how do you think I could ever face him or my baby again if I let them go unavenged?”

“It’s not in heaven you’ll be meeting that dear little innocent, nor never seeing her no more —”

“Oh, *be quiet*, Louisa!” Dorothea stamped. “Put

Uncle Jack's stars in my hair," she ordered. "And I'll not wear that old black thing to-night. I'll have the silver brocade."

"The brocade, miss? It ain't suitable, miss. A deal too dressy."

Dorothea slewed round in her chair and looked up with an expression which sent Louisa off to fetch the silver brocade without another word. Persuasion was no good with Dorothea. Flat contradiction might sometimes avail; and the flatter it was, the more likely to hit the turning angle of that incalculable young person. But if it did not chance to hit that angle — well, there was nothing for it but prompt obedience.

Dorothea, a world-weary cynic of twenty-one, not infrequently thought in terms of the penny novelettes which were her favorite reading. She had conceived the idea of arraying herself for conquest, after the fashion of the Lady Ermytrude in *The Heart of a Countess*. Every evening hitherto she had worn what the author of that interesting romance might have described as "a modest little black frock of some soft, clinging material." The brocade was full dress; it had a short-waisted bodice, with strands of silver crossing on the breast and a silver girdle. The petticoat, heavily embroidered, was short enough to show her silver shoes. Over her shoulders, jasmine-white and dimpled, fell a scarf of silver gauze; and there were diamond stars in the darkness of her hair. In fine, when Louisa had done with her, she was herself a star of loveliness bright enough to dazzle anybody.

Lettice was waiting in the hall to see her cousin start, Denis having as usual got ready half-an-hour too soon, with his rod and his rug and his bag and a basket for Geraldine the kitten. They were exchanging those labored last words which even the best of friends manufacture while the carriage delayeth its coming, when this vision swept down on them, with her nose in the air. Evidently Dorothea had not forgiven Lettice for cutting short her talk, or Denis for suffering it to be done. She sailed on to the salon, where

her entrance was greeted with a comically sudden hush, such as fell on the dinner-table when a new course made its appearance. Lettice relieved her feelings with one of her favorite words; not "nice" this time, but "Well!"

"There, you see you've lost me a commission, Lettice!" said Denis, laughing.

"Me? I didn't do anything!"

"What's up?" asked Gardiner. He had come out of his den, with a pot of flowers in his arms, just in time to witness the transit of Venus, and had been favored, in contradistinction to the others, with a gracious smile; his face had changed, ever so little, in response. Denis opened his lips to reply, but Lettice was too quick for him.

"Why, Miss O'Connor and I were having such a nice cozy talk together, and Denis would come bothering with his *old aeroplanes*" (the tone of spite was delicious), "and of course she didn't like it, and now he's cross with me because she doesn't want to buy one! Robs me of my only friend, and they says it's my fault, and abuses me like, like — like a pickpocket! Well, well!"

Nobody could play the injured innocent better than Lettice, above all when she was in the wrong. She played with Denis as delicately as a kitten plays with a leaf. "Yes, you're an ill-used person, aren't you?" he said. He put his arm round her shoulders and gently pressed her down into a chair; he would never let her stand if he could help it. "At any rate, you're not in it, Harry," he said, speaking over her head to Gardiner. "She's not carried over our sins to you, that's one good thing!"

"Yes, didn't I get a beamer?" said Gardiner, with his easy laugh. He fell back to observe the flowers he had been arranging. "Not that I should afflict myself if she did. So long as she pays her bill, it's all one to me!"

He fancied, as he spoke, that a gleam passed over Miss Smith's countenance; but at that moment the omnibus arrived, and amid good-bys and good wishes Dorothea was forgotten. When the traveler had departed, and when Gardiner had stood on the step waving his hand till the last

minute, he turned, and came face to face with Lettice. They looked at each other as the two intimate friends of a common friend do look, when the link (or should it be called a barrier?) is removed from between them. It might be said that this was the first time Gardiner had ever seen Lettice, for, remembering that gleam, he looked with curiosity. He found himself gazing into a pair of perfectly intelligent and faintly derisive hazel eyes.

When you have summed up a person as ordinary and inoffensive, it is a shock to discover that the said person has turned the tables by reading the inmost secrets of your heart. Gardiner felt as though he had suddenly become transparent. Fairly disconcerted, he wheeled round, and almost fell over the chambermaid, who was at his elbow offering him a note. "Tiens!" said Rosalie. The note dropped; the draught from the open door whisked it down the hall to Lettice's feet. Lettice, like her cousin, was a dandy in affairs of honor, and would not willingly have glanced even at the envelope of another person's letter; but in this case, as she stooped, she could not avoid seeing that the handwriting was Dorothea's. She gave it back, and had the unique satisfaction of seeing Gardiner color as he thanked her. Then she slipped away, and left him to enjoy his letter alone.

"Could you possibly give me just *five minutes* this evening, I have something *very important* I want to ask you. I will be up at the crucifix at half-past nine on the chance.—D. M. O'C."

Above the gardens of the Bellevue, which had a slope of one in six, there was an orchard of white-stockinged fruit trees, which had a slope of one in four. Above that again rose the grassy hill-side, steeper and steeper, till after a veritable scramble you reached the top, which was marked by a cairn of stones and a crucifix. Beyond the crucifix were level uplands—dry silvery grass, dark knots of furze or bramble, clayey ruts winding away to a wood of stunted firs which leaned, like the grasses, all along the wind. But

on the other side of the cross, what a view! This hill was scarcely a mile as the crow flies from the cliffs of Rochehaut, yet it faced a wholly different reach of the river, some ten miles distant, by water, from the ford where Dorothea had cut her foot; the river performed a figure of eight in between. This was no scene of theatrical beauty, no famous *pointe de vue*, like that above Frahan; yet Gardiner loved it more. It gave him the free wind and the open sky, and it gave them to him alone; no one ever came up here, except perhaps a laborer trudging inland to Rochehaut, the village of the middens. *Odi profanum vulgus*. For Gardiner, beautiful Frahan was forever tainted by the thousands of admiring eyes which had rested upon it.

The hills here sank down in wide-spreading slopes, great shoulders and flanks all silvery and slippery with grass. At their feet the river rippled, shallow and broad; and on the green floor of the valley were clustered the houses of Poupehan, a tiny gray hamlet with a tiny gray bridge which gathered the stream within its span, though above and below it spread out its rounded pools. On the farther bank, the hills rose like a wall, a sweep of dark woods. That white streak, could it be a road? Yes, it was the bridle track going up to Corbion on the height; it hung against the side-hill like a scarf. At the top you might see the gray extinguiser cap of Corbion church, among trees. But the eye came back to rest on those glorious woods; how rich they were, deep-plumaged, somber, steep as a curtain!

By dint of neglecting his letters, and scamping his flowers, Gardiner managed to keep tryst some minutes before the time appointed. He sat down on the stones and leaned against the crucifix, which shot up over his head, lank and black and forlornly crooked, a ten-foot spar supporting a ten-inch figure. The moon was coining liquid silver in a slate-blue sky; the faint gold lamps of Poupehan showed vague in the gray depth of the valley. There by the river the mists were rising, the meadows drenched and cold and silvery with dew; here on the hill-top the air was velvet-warm and dry, and sweet with honeysuckle. Big grasshoppers

whirred all round in the grass, and a corncrake in the fir-wood behind let off at intervals his long mechanical rattle. There were owls, too, hoo-hooing, and one whose note was like a silvery bell, calling from the woods across the valley. It was a night of romance — a night for love.

Gardiner's planets were Mercury and Venus; he incongruously combined the money-getting instinct with a sensuous temperament. He had intended to spend those minutes calmly in reviewing the pros and cons of marriage with Dorothea — for there were a good many cons; marriage, even with a rich woman, did not come into his scheme of life. But the white enchantment of the moonlight was too much for him; he became a lover and nothing more.

Meanwhile Dorothea, climbing the hill, was beginning to wish she had not put on that silver brocade. If she was not careful, he would get out of hand; and if he got out of hand — She had come to Rochehaut, in the first instance, bent on hunting down her enemy, but without any definite plan. True, the Lady Ermyntrude used her attractions for the undoing of the wicked Lord Henry; but it had never entered Dorothea's head to do the like, probably because the idea was instinctively repugnant. It was very repugnant; and when chance, and the accident at the ford, showed her her power, though she used it, it was only after a struggle. Not that she had any scruples of morality: Dorothea was as unmoral a creature as one could find in a Christian land, she was guided solely by her feelings. But, in spite of eight months of marriage, she was still fiercely virginal; she could not with equanimity suffer herself to be desired, above all by Gardiner. Still, being perfectly persuaded that she owed this duty to her dead, she was not going to turn back. Dorothea had the merits of her defects; she was not a coward.

She arrived breathless, with her skirts tucked over her arm, and one glance told her that her naïve plan for dazzling him had succeeded a little too well. His eyes caught sudden fire; he was on his feet in a moment, bowing to her with a dash of foreign extravagance.

"Barbarous behavior!" he said. "Rank cruelty, no less. Do you know you're three and a half minutes behind time?"

Decidedly he was getting out of hand. Dorothea retreated a pace or two, and wound her arm round the stem of the cross as if for support.

"I—I wanted to speak to you for a moment—"

"So you said; on business, wasn't it? I'm all attention. You don't look much like business to-night, do you know?"

"I can't say anything if you look at me like that!" cried Dorothea in a rush. Gardiner laughed and cast down his eyes. "No, please, if you'd turn right away—I shall never get it out to your face—"

"Señorita, if the moon doesn't desire to be looked at, she shouldn't appear in silver," said Gardiner, complying. "That suit? Now, what's the trouble?"

"It's a little difficult to explain." It was; her breath came fluttering and her voice shook. "You must be patient with me if I say it wrong." ("Patient! I'll be something besides patient," Gardiner murmured.) "It's—well, it's just this. Have you—do you remember ever seeing my maid before?"

There was an instant change in the atmosphere.

"Your maid? That gaunt female who looks like the Nonconformist conscience? I might have. Why?"

"She says she's seen you."

"Where?"

"At your hotel at Grasmere."

"At Grasmere? At the Easedale?"

Dorothea nodded.

"Go on," he prompted steadily.

"It was last August," said Dorothea. "She was in the service of a Mrs. Trent—"

She stopped. She could feel the sudden increase of tension. "Ah, I thought from your tone I'd been doing something reprehensible," said Gardiner, with a dry laugh. "Go on. I suppose she's told you a pretty yarn. I'm a murderer—is that it?"

"Oh, no, *no!* it's only that she says the whole truth didn't

come out at the inquest. She says you — you threw something at him — a chisel — Mrs. Trent picked it up afterwards — no, please wait a moment till I've done! Louisa says too — I made her tell — that he, the man who died, had a temper, that he very likely said the most horrid things. I don't think even she thinks you were much to blame, while of course I — But she did think I ought to know; and I think so too. So I want you to tell me the very truth. Did you do it?"

Gardiner met her pleading glance, and a confession rose to his lips. Then — whether he caught some shade of expression which was not wholly innocent: whether the truth was that at heart he really trusted no one save Denis and his father — he temporized.

"Why do you want to know?"

"I think so much of you!"

"How much do you think of me? Enough to warrant my telling you a thing like that? — always supposing I'd done it, of course, which I don't admit."

"Yes."

"It would be next door to murder, you know. A man wouldn't be safe to confess a murder except to his wife."

"Oh! — well, tell me, then."

"You mean that?"

She nodded.

"Sure?"

"Yes, yes. Tell me."

"Ah!" said Gardiner, with an exultant laugh, "when you're my wife, I will!"

He stepped forward and took her in his arms. Dorothea struggled, and he thought little of it; but she got her arm free, doubled her fist, and hit out with such fury that he let her go, and fell back, his illusions tumbling about his ears. What a face she turned on him — all coarsened and distorted with passion!

"I hate you," she said.

"You loved me just now!"

"Never, never. I never did. I wish you were in hell.

Oh! shall I ever feel clean again?" She was scrubbing away at her face as if she would have scraped off the skin. Gardiner stared, stupefied. Suddenly he gripped her arm.

"*Who* are you?"

Dorothea shook him off frantically; all her plans went overboard in one surge of fury.

"The wife of the man you murdered!"

CHAPTER X

A LODGE IN THE WILDERNESS

This is away in the fields — miles!

Pippa Passes

ON the day after Denis left the Bellevue, Dorothea also departed, with her mountain of trunks. She did not see Gardiner again. Louisa paid the bill. The feelings of the rejected lover, who had to make up the account and take the money, deserve mention as being probably unique.

On the second morning after this, Lettice received a letter from her cousin, inclosing a cheque for £20 and an entreaty that she would stay on at the Bellevue. "Send it back, my dear girl, if you don't feel like taking it," Denis wrote, "or call it a loan: I'd much rather you didn't, but I shan't feel hurt if you do. Only remember I don't need the money, and I'd rather spend it this way than any other. I hate to see you looking seedy, and you're not anything like fit yet, you know. Besides, I'd like you and Gardiner to get to know each other. You never would, so long as I was there in the way." A remark which showed that Denis was no fool. Lettice, who had been looking forward to an unpeaceful time in the bosom of her family, accepted the loan with simple gratitude, and stayed. It was easy to take favors from Denis: could higher testimonial be given?

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Bredon was a seaside place without a single villa; just half-a-dozen old cottages and a new church, standing on the verge of the chalk cliffs of Thanet. This church was a building of surprising ugliness, red brick outside, decorated

inside with stenciled texts chopped up like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The east window had paper transparencies, leaded and colored to imitate glass. The holy table was a table, with obvious legs, having the Ten Commandments above and a Bible upon it — none of your papistical altars. The vicar was a robust Evangelical with a mustache. Denis did not like him very much, but he approved of his doctrine, and attended his church.

Picture him, then, on his first Sunday at home, coming out into the churchyard among that humble congregation (vicar's wife, vicar's man, school children, candidate for coals, village policeman in uniform, one girl —

"And what took her there, do you guess?
Her sweet little duck of a bonnet,
And her new second-hand silk dress")

and setting forth on his three-mile tramp across the marshes. Denis would neither cycle, motor, nor fly upon a Sunday. This was the more inconvenient because, if Bredon was out of the world, Dandelion Farm, the present home of the Smith aeroplane, might be said to be howling in the wilderness.

It was still early in September, and after a rainy night the sky was blue again, the air crystal-pure over the flat green land. The road had neither fence nor hedgerow, but on either side a dark blue ribbon of water lay brimming and crumpling in the sea wind. Other such dikes, intersecting, ruled out the square fields of Thanet, where red cattle, like wooden beasts out of a Noah's Ark, grazed on pastures coarsely green. There was no sign of autumn but in the sedge, withered putty-color, and rustling a dry, pleasant song. In spring the yellow iris fringed the waterways; later, forget-me-not, loosestrife, meadow-sweet; now only the tall mud-clotted stems of the willow-herb, and its pink stars seeding in silvery down. Denis walked on, content. He did not consciously think about his surroundings, but unconsciously he was happier here than among the hills and woods of Arden. Thanet was English, and he was

English — well, he was ~~was~~ Irish; but he had all the Englishman's conservatism and love for the ways of home, what foreigners call his insularity.

Straight ahead at the end of the track rose a delicately penciled group of trees, with a gray roof showing beside, and white dots of sheep on the gray-green of their pasture. This was Dandelion, *videlicet* Dent-de-lion. Till a few months since, the partners had rented a bungalow on the sands near Bredon; but there Denis had been so pestered with interviewers, autograph hunters, and less estimable gentry who came to pick his brains, that after some debate they had transferred themselves to this lodge in the wilderness. Part of the ground that went with the house was to be flooded, for the use of seaplanes; while there was ample space in addition for an aerodrome and for workshops, hangars, etc., which could be shut off behind a palisading, and defy curiosity.

These new erections were frankly ugly, but there was a certain dignity about the square gray Georgian farm-house and its outbuildings. Denis passed a barn, its thatched roof cushioned with mosses, then a haystack, exhaling its warm sweet scent, then the stone gate-posts of the entrance. The gate was open, and he paused to latch it; gates left to swing shake off their hinges. He walked round the curve of the drive, his mind agreeably occupied with thoughts of cold beef, came in sight of the pillared portico — thrice horrid sight! there was a car standing at the door!

It was not his partner's, for the letter was P, not LD; nor was the car itself much like the battered and beloved old racer which Wandesforde liked to use. This was a Rolls-Royce touring car of the present year's model. No chauffeur was in charge. After prowling round to satisfy the curiosity which any piece of machinery roused in his engineer's brain, Denis went into the house to make inquiries. The porch opened into a passage with rooms on either side. Denis was tiptoeing towards the kitchen, where he hoped to find his man, when the door on the left opened suddenly, revealing the visitor — Dorothea O'Connor.

"So here you are at last!" she said. "I *am* so glad! I've been stuck here ever since eleven!"

Denis did not echo her joy. "I thought you were at Rochehaut!"

"Me? No, wasn't it funny? I had to leave, in a hurry, the very day after you did. I came off down here first thing this morning. It's a glorious run through Kent — the car did travel!"

"Your chauffeur, I suppose, is in with my man?"

"Isn't. I didn't bring one," she airily explained. "I didn't bring anybody. I hate being driven, I like to do things for myself. I've come to see the aeroplanes, you know. I told you I should!"

She stuck her hands in her pockets and propped her slim shoulders against the wall, looking up with a naughty and audacious tilt of the chin. "Here I am and you can't get rid of me!" she seemed to say.

Denis did not want her in the least. It was two o'clock, and humanity constrained him to ask her to lunch; there was not an inn for miles where she could get a meal, if he didn't, and she must actually have seen his cold beef on the table. But Denis was an Irishman, with strict ideas of propriety. Dorothea, not for the first time, had forgotten her part; while posing as a young girl, she claimed the freedom of a married woman. Reading her mistake in his face, she was quick to seize the bull by the horns.

"I suppose I've no business here, and I know you don't want me, but I'm not going back now till I've seen everything!" she announced; and then, melting into the wheedling, insinuating smile of a child: "You can look on me as a man and a brother, or you can count me as business — I *am* — I don't care what you do, only do forgive me, and do, do, *do* ask me to lunch, for I'm *so* hungry!"

Denis smiled too, though stiffly, making the best of it. "I shall be very pleased to show you the place, Miss O'Connor, but it's a pity you've come to-day, for you'll not see any flyin'. The men are all home, you know."

"Why, I came on purpose because I thought Sunday was *the day!*"

"It isn't with us."

Dorothea was subdued. She did not ask why, but meekly reentered the room. The partners had divided the house between them, and this was Denis's den, corresponding to Wandesforde's across the passage. Wandesforde, though he lived in town and was only a casual visitor at Dent-delion, had made himself extremely comfortable; Denis had brought his old furniture from Bredon and dumped it in the room, just as it was. There were two sash windows, filled with small panes. Under one stood a table as big as a four-poster, covered with papers. Denis could lay his hand on any packet in the dark; but when papers are in order, unfortunately it does not follow that they are tidy. In the middle of the floor stood a second table, just large enough to take Denis's plate and the cold beef. Beside the fireplace, which had a marbled wooden mantelpiece, stood a pair of leathern arm-chairs, once plum-colored, now seamed with white cracks, and with every spring broken. The walls were covered with drab paper, fading to yellow, there was a square of drab drugget on the floor, and the ceiling was drab also, from ancient lamp smoke. Dorothea thought in passing that it was the ugliest room she had ever been in, but she, like Denis, was highly indifferent to her surroundings.

But she was by no means indifferent to her host; she thought him the handsomest man she had ever seen, an opinion held by other young ladies before her, though Denis's looks were not at all in the style of the barber's block. He was just under six feet in height, lightly built and light in movement, all bone and sinew. His face was thin too, a little pinched at the temples, a little hollow in the cheeks, with dark brows, dark hair, and a white skin which burnt biscuit-brown, not red. Irish coloring and deep-set, dark blue Irish eyes, "put in with a dirty finger" under their long soft lashes. The lower part of the face, nose and lips and chin, was most delicately modeled, fine,

high-bred, rather ascetic in type. In short, he was as handsome as a paladin, *à fendre le cœur*, and so purely indifferent to the fact, one way or the other, that Lettice when she poked her soft fun at him got no more than an absent-minded smile. No rises were to be had in that quarter. But Dorothea was not given to poking fun at people; she planted her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands, adoring his looks, hanging breathless on his words, divided in admiration between his person and his profession — and how those great eyes of hers could lighten and glow! They were not the same eyes, she was not the same girl who had poured out her lightnings on Harry Gardiner.

In telling her tale to Lettice, Dorothea had said less than the truth. For one thing, she was ashamed to own that she had been physically afraid of her uncle. The anger of a stupid and wrong-headed man may be a very brutal thing. When he threatened to knock her down, Dorothea gave in, in helpless rage and humiliation, bad companions for a high-spirited girl. Also she suffered more than she herself realized from her isolation. Dorothea was the born devotee; she would never have learned to hate if she had had any one to adore. But she was quite alone. The neighborhood was up in arms, no doubt, but nobody was anxious to stand forth as her champion: partly because people are always loath to interfere in a neighbor's business, partly because the unlucky little heiress had been painted by her loving relatives in such very lurid colors that some of the paint had stuck.

Then came Major Trent to stay at the Anglers' Rest. He met Dorothea one morning when she had been sent out to exercise her aunt's Chow. The amiable Xit tried to bite the stranger, and did bite Dorothea when she hauled him off. Naturally Trent expressed his concern. Naturally Dorothea did not mention the incident at home. They met again next day, of course by chance, in the same place — in fine, Dorothea had found her champion. The affair was rushed through in a month. Mrs. O'Connor woke up one morning to miss her early cup of tea. She descended in a

dressing-gown to scold Dorothea, but no Dorothea was to be found. She had gone, without leaving so much as the traditional note on her pin-cushion. Next day came the announcement of her marriage, by special license, to Major Trent, D.S.O.

Dorothea when she married was innocent and ignorant as a child. She came to Trent with eager fresh gratitude and affection. She spent eight months with him; eight feverish, hothouse-forcing months of premature emotion. Towards the end of the time, when his passion had cooled, and when she herself was calmed and steadied by the hope of motherhood, she began to look at her battered knight with wondering eyes, which would soon have grown critical. His tragic death, however, made criticism disloyal, and invested Trent with all his former glories. It swept away, too, the hope to which the girl had been looking forward with grave, ennobling joy. Only Louisa knew how frantically Dorothea grieved for her baby. Her long illness was really an obstinate refusal to be comforted. Louisa, it may be noted, had not been Dorothea's devoted nurse. She had been Mr. O'Connor's incomparable cook; and the unkindest blow his niece dealt was that she carried off, when she went, the only perfect maker of *soufflés* he had ever known.

Here was Dorothea, then, at twenty-one, half a child and half a woman, frantic with grief, and convinced that the murderer of her husband and child was going free unpunished. She vowed herself to vengeance as a sacred duty. She was unpersuadably sure that all she had done to Gardiner was justifiable. But Denis was different. True, he had screened the murderer, but Dorothea couldn't but own that in his shoes she would have done the same. She was not quite happy in her mind; but she crushed the scruple, telling herself that when justice is done the innocent must suffer with the guilty. She crushed it, and presently she forgot it, yes, and her vengeance into the bargain, when they went out to see the works. Aeroplanes are so exciting! After all, Dorothea was not much more than a baby, and she had long arrears of play to make up.

In old days, Denis and his man Simpson had built the machines with their own hands; later, at Bredon, they employed half-a-dozen men; now there were twenty, and the number was growing. Behind the tall palisade a nest of sheds was springing up — wood and metal working shops, rigging rooms, offices, stores, Simpson's cabin where he slept as night watchman, and finally the hangars. Great ugly erections of brickwork and corrugated iron, with gable ends and sliding doors, they caught the eye at once. The first held an unfinished seaplane, marked for rebuilding after undergoing her trials; a biplane built in 1911, now hopelessly out of date; and a Blériot monoplane belonging to Wandesforde which Denis hated, and which, he gravely assured his companion, would kill him if he gave it the chance. But he hurried Dorothea past these to the smaller shed, which contained only one machine: his favorite, his beloved, the 80 h.p. monoplane scout which had been entered for the Birmingham race.

She was very small, scarcely larger than Santos-Dumont's famous "Demoiselle." There was a slender bird-like body, the fuselage, in which the pilot sat, deep-sunk, with passenger behind, engine and propeller in front, the two long blades standing out like antennæ. Pale wings arched and tilted upwards on either side, curving like the wings of a gull in flight. The whole stood on a light framework, the chassis or under-carriage, corresponding to the feet of a bird. Dorothea listened, while Denis explained the perfections of his handiwork. Tangential, lift coefficient, angle of incidence, such terms went in at one ear and out at the other; she was not interested in scientific aeronautics. Denis was expounding the principles of stream-line design, as shown in the curves of his fuselage, when she interrupted.

"Mr. Merion-Smith, will you teach me to fly?"

"Will I teach you to fly?"

"Yes. You said I could learn. I want to learn."

He shook his head, smiling. "You should go to Hendon or Brooklands. We don't run a flying school, you know."

"I don't want to go to Hendon or Brooklands, I want to

go to you," retorted Dorothea flatly. "I want you to build me a machine like this one, and I want you to teach me to manage it. Will you?"

"I'm afraid that's out of the question."

"Why?"

If Denis had told the bare truth, he must have answered, Because I don't want to. As that was unsayable, he hedged.

"Well, for one thing, I've no plane you could learn on. You need a special school machine, with duplicate control for pilot and pupil — we've nothing of the sort."

"If that's all, I'll buy one."

"Buy a machine that'll be no earthly use to you six months hence?"

"Why not? Why shouldn't I throw my money away if I want to? It's good for trade, and it can't possibly matter to you!"

Denis looked as though it mattered a good deal. Geraldine, who had followed them from the house like a dog, seized this moment to make a scrambling leap on his shoulder. He steadied her with one hand mechanically as she walked to and fro, pushing now her nose and now her tail into his face, after the inconsiderate manner of a happy cat, but obviously she was too much a matter of course to interrupt his thoughts. All he said was: "I should wait till I was older, if I were you."

"Pooh! I'm as old as that boy who was killed at East-church last week, and he'd had his ticket for two years."

"Quite possibly, but then you see he is dead."

"Ah, you say that because you think I'm reckless, but that's only with money. I shouldn't be reckless flying, I should love my plane far too much." She rubbed her cheek softly against the varnished fabric of the wing.

"That remains to be seen," said Denis, smiling.

"No, it doesn't. I *am* careful. I've driven my car about town for two years now, and never had a summons or an accident."

Denis looked at her with more respect, but he continued to shake his head. "Go to Hendon and get your ticket,

and then come back to me, and I'll build you a machine with pleasure."

"I won't. I'll learn of you, or not at all."

"Then I'm afraid it will have to be not at all."

"Oh, you are hateful," said Dorothea succinctly. She turned her back on him and marched towards the door. Half-way there she thought better of it, and came back to lay her clasped hands on his arm, frankly imploring. "Oh, do teach me!" she besought. "Do. *Do*. You don't know how much I want it! Why won't you? Is it because I'm not a man?"

Denis was driven a step nearer the truth. "I've really not the time. I'm a designer, not an instructor; it would not be fair to my partner to undertake outside work."

"Ah, but I shouldn't take long to learn. I'm good with machinery. Besides, if you won't teach me I won't buy one of your machines, and that'll be worse for your partner than just the few hours you'd have to give up — two, wasn't it, that man learned in the other day? Won't you at least ask Mr. Wandesforde if he'd mind? Please, please say yes!"

Denis was wishing her at Jericho. He delighted in a battle, but he had no armor against coaxing. He did not in the least want to teach Miss O'Connor, or any one else, to fly. He had a full winter's work before him on the sea-plane, and he hated (like Lettice) to be dragged out of his rut. Finally, Dorothea was a woman; and women are an endless bother. Seeing a chance of evading her, he jumped at it.

"Well, I'll ask Wandesforde if you like," he conceded.

Dorothea took her hands off his arm with a nod of satisfaction. "I thought I'd get you to do it," she said. "I always know what I want and I generally get it. It's only a question of wanting it hard enough. I'll go now, and leave you in peace. You'll write to him at once, won't you?"

Oh yes, Denis would write at once. He was already concocting the letter as he locked up the sheds. "I've had

a nuisance of a woman here pretending she wants to order a machine on condition that one of us teaches her to fly. Quite young, and I should say quite irresponsible. I told her, of course, that we didn't run a school, but I wouldn't absolutely refuse without consulting you."

He had got as far as this when Dorothea broke in. She was looking rather solemn.

"I forgot to say one thing. Do you mind, if you're writing to Mr. Gardiner, not telling him anything about me? Or Lettice either," she added.

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Denis after a moment.

"I do wish it."

They walked on in silence. At the steps Dorothea paused for a last word.

"I've had a quarrel with him. A bad quarrel. I don't want him to know I'm here, because if he does he'll think it his duty to write and warn you against me."

This was the truth, and, as truth often does, it conveyed a false impression.

"Gardiner?" said Denis, incredulous. "He would never do that."

"He would, he would, you don't know. He might not to any one else, but he would to you."

This was true again, and again misleading. Denis was puzzled. "I thought you and he were — friends," he said.

"Not now. He hates me."

"Gardiner hates you?"

"Yes. Thinks me wicked. Wouldn't willingly be under the same roof. He does, he does. And we can never make it up. I'm angry with Lettice too, at present, but I *shall* make it up with her, because I love her. But not with Mr. Gardiner — never, never."

"Well, if you say so," said Denis, "but I thought —"

Dorothea looked up with a flash of understanding. No need to put into words what he had thought about her and Gardiner.

"That?" she said. "Oh no — never, never, *never!*"

This time Denis believed her.

CHAPTER XI

COSAS DE BRUJAS

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell.

Sudden Light.

"My dearest dear, will you come for a little walk?"

"Muy señora mia, with all the pleasure in life."

Lettice, who was stooping over a new kitten which she had adopted since the departure of Geraldine, straightened herself and looked at Gardiner with a discouraging expression. They were at the back of the house; she had been about to climb the steep hill orchard to watch the sunset when her minute friend charged out of the kitchen door, on her weak little legs no thicker than matches, with her tiny triangular tail flourishing in the air. Lettice had not, however, expected her host to follow directly on the kitten's heels.

He stood there laughing. "It's time for your evening constitutional. You haven't been out once since Denis went off. He left you in my charge; I shan't feel I'm doing my duty if I don't accept your very pressing invitation."

"I was not speaking to you," said Lettice deliberately.

He only laughed again.

"I know that; you never do speak to a Christian if you can possibly get out of it, do you? Give me that atom. No, I won't hurt her; I've some milk for her here — she was just going to drink it when she heard your welcome footstep and affection was too much for her. Come on, vidita mia."

Dexterously, even tenderly, he detached the clinging claws from Lettice's shoulder, and set down the mite at the saucer. The little head nodded over it, sniffing tentatively, and then

out came a minute pink tongue and she began to lap, crouching down and crooning a contented purr. Lettice liked the way Gardiner lifted out a paw which had insinuated itself into the saucer, and stroked one finger down four inches of tabby spine. Then he looked up.

"As a matter of fact, I've an errand on hand, at the farm where we get our milk. Will you come with me? I wish you would. I'm bored of my own company."

"Is it far?" asked Lettice defensively.

"Mile. Don't come if you're fagged, but sacrifice yourself to oblige a fellow-creature if it's only laziness—or unsociability."

"Well," said Lettice, permitting herself the hint of a smile. She liked again the quick way he picked himself up, taking her at her word to the instant.

"Come on, then. There's only just time; I've masses of letters to write before the post goes, and I know you aren't going to be hurried."

For all his quickness (and he was instinctively quick and light in every movement), Lettice found him a more considerate companion than Denis, who walked her off her legs. Their way led up through the steep hill orchard to the grassy hill-side above. Once he stopped and turned to help her over the rough ground, but when she silently avoided seeing his extended hand, he did not offer it again. Denis, rooted in his old-fashioned courtesy, had never learned to leave her alone. This was a very different type of mind; less restful, because more perceptive. When they reached the crest of the hill he pulled up. Lettice tried to persuade herself it was not done to let her get her breath, but she was quite sure it was.

"See that hedge over there?" he said, pointing across the expanse of level silvery grass. "Well, you'd never think it, but beyond that it's nothing but arable flats, beet and cabbages and potatoes, all the way to Rochehaut. Anything duller you can't imagine. And yet under this very spot where we're standing there's a cave that's never been explored, running Lord knows how deep into the hill. Stalac-

tites and stalagmites and an underground river. I went in once with my torch, but I had to come back — too unsafe. Some day I'll have that place shored up and made accessible, and charge five francs for admission, like the caves of Han. Leg-up for the Bellevue, what? I like this sort of mixed grill, you know, wild and tame together — I like all this country. No, not that way — there's some view from the crucifix you see against the sky-line, but we haven't time for it to-night. Along here, through the wood."

Lettice looked round, before following him into the copse of starveling firs, and gorse, and ragged heather. From where they stood, a little below the crucifix, they could not see the valley; only the silvery undulating hill-side, and the evening sky, and the grasses leaning sidelong in the wind. It was lonely and bare enough to please her. "Are you going to stop here?" she asked.

"I am. *D.V.* What? Oh yes, I'm pious in my way, especially when I get off alone among these hills. I believe I belong here — sort of ancestral feeling; talking of which, I'll show you something rather queer at the farm when we get there. Yes, I'm going to stay, if I'm let." He walked on, twirling his stick in the air. "Last time I was up here it was with Miss O'Connor," he added irrelevantly.

Lettice was a good deal surprised; she thought she understood now why he had not wished to come alone. She had not been told, but she knew, as well from his looks as from Dorothea's headlong flight, that the explosion had come. Gardiner might keep up his laugh, that eternal laugh which grated on a sensitive ear like the squeaking of a pen, but he could not hide the change in his features, pinched and sharpened by suffering. Suffering — yes — pain: physical pain, that was what his face betrayed: not grief. His dark eyes — they were, the poet decided, like the depths of a pine-wood: dark blackish-brown, with undertones of dark green — were like those of a dog that has been run over. No one else seemed to notice anything wrong; at the pension one woman had remarked casually that Mr. Gardiner was looking seedy, that was all; but then no one but Lettice held the key.

If his frankness surprised her, it surprised himself more, for he had by no means intended to mention Dorothea. He sheered off the subject in a hurry. "I've been up here most evenings lately," he said. "Madame Hasquin has a bureau on which I've set my heart; she means me to have it in the end, but I can't get her to terms. No, it's not the money, it's the fun — sheer delight in bargaining. I don't mind. It's rather jolly up here in the evenings, you get the sunset; and it's soul-refreshingly lonely. This wood — you'd never guess there was a house within five minutes, would you? Stand still a moment."

He laid his hand on her arm to detain her, and the silence fell on them like a pall. Not a leaf stirred; the firs raised their black spikes rigid against the sky, some erect, some doubled and contorted like ogres. Brambles, crouching low, thrust out long stealthy clutching claws across the track. The sky was golden, and gold were the strips of water lying in the ruts, winding away to the open hill and safety; but the wood was dark, dark, and already in its depths, here and there, a glow-worm had lit its tiny keen speck of unearthly fire, glass-green, steady, burning but unconsumed. "That's the way to the cave," murmured Gardiner, his voice dropping, his grip tightening on her arm. "*Cosas de brujas* — witches, I mean. Never tell me a wood isn't alive!"

He meant it. Lettice, who professed to be stolid, found herself responding to his fancy with an involuntary thrill. There *was* something wrong about the place; it had its finger on its lip; it seemed to hold a secret of its own, to threaten them with it, to jeer at their unforeseeing ignorance.

The silence was broken by a sudden outburst of merry childish laughter and the sharp barks of a dog. Gardiner laughed too, releasing her. "And now come on. Round this corner — mind the gate, it'll pinch your fingers, better let me. There: what do you think of that?"

They were clear of the wood and out on the open hillside, looking down into a valley, a green crease among velvet-green hills softly molded, falling away to a line of trees, among which tinkled the crystal cascades of a brook. On

the upward slope beyond rose a group of buildings. A round squat tower, a line of loopholed wall; the low white front of a dwelling-house, rising among golden ricks; the flickering brightness of a bonfire, a tall, slender ribbon of golden incandescence, burning in a golden fume, gilding the dark branches of the orchard, loosing flakes of flame and drifts of lavender-gray smoke into the lavender-blue of the sky. Two children and a dog were dancing round it, feeding it with masses of golden bracken; it was their laughter which had broken into the enchanted wood.

"When the Bellevue started life as a convent, that was the convent farm," said Gardiner. "Fortified — Lord, yes, they needed forts in those days; it dates from Spanish times. Didn't you know that? There's not much of the old stuff left in my Bellevue, bar the gateway and the *salle*, which is substantially the old refectory. But that old tower down there is pretty much as it was in the beginning. Ferme de la Croix, they call it; Convent of the Holy Cross, you'd say, but I don't myself believe that's the origin of the name. Come on down and I'll show you."

Lettice had not contributed much in words to the conversation, but she had done her part for all that, in following the quick turns of his mind. They went down, crossed a bridge built of slabs of uncut stone, and were greeted at the door by a woman of fifty who looked seventy. She had not a tooth in her head; it was hard to believe she was the mother and not the grandmother of the two tow-headed children. "Eh, monsieur, quelles nouvelles?" But the sweetness of her smile redeemed the plainness of her face.

Gardiner followed her down a white passage, not one line of which was true, into a low-pitched, pleasant living-room, with scarlet geraniums in the window. There beside the open hearth stood the bureau, black as bog oak and richly carved, with shining brass handles on drawers that slipped in and out at the touch of a finger. Madame chattered in her abominable Walloon French, Gardiner laughed and argued back; it was sadly plain to Lettice, who could distinguish such niceties, that he had picked up the accent of

the country. There are disadvantages in being imitative. They came to the question of price, and Lettice, feeling herself *de trop*, withdrew to the open door. She waited there, between rose and crimson hollyhocks, making love to a lean-flanked sandy cat who rushed effusively out of the stable-yard, and reared herself on hind legs to press her hard head against the visitor's hand. The children had disappeared, but their voices were heard in the orchard. In the west, soft bluish clouds were floating on lakes of burning rose. A big star was born above the dark spires of the enchanted wood, keen silver in the faint and fading gold.

Gardiner came out in high good-humor. "You've brought me luck," he said. "Madame's given in at last. I've had my eye on the bureau ever since the first time I came up here — haven't I, madame? And now, when's the four-poster coming? When I've been at you about it for another couple of years — is that the idea?"

"Jamis, *ja-mais*," said madame, vigorously shaking her head, laughing all over her wrinkles. "Non, monsieur, non. Je tiens à mon lit, savez-vous!"

"Et moi aussi, j'y tiens, et je vas l'avoir, savez-vous?" Gardiner laughed back, cheerfully ungrammatical. He laid his hand again on Lettice's arm — a small elegant brown hand: in nothing was he more un-English than in the shape and size of his hands and feet: Lettice looked down on it with an insulted expression which was quite wasted, as he wheeled her round to face the house — "Here's what I said I'd show you; it really is rather queer. That stone above the arch — do you see?"

The farm had a square-shouldered doorway; the head-piece was a single massive block of stone. Deep carved thereon, in the same old-fashioned numerals which appeared on the lintel of the Bellevue, was the same date: 1548. Above the date was lettering, moss-grown and indistinct.

"Can you read it?" asked Gardiner.

Was there anything requiring eyes which Lettice could not read? "Manuel de la Cruz," she spelt out.

"Cruz," Gardiner corrected her, giving to the "z" its soft

Castilian lisp. "Now I do not in the least believe the convent, and consequently this farm, was dedicated to the Holy Cross. I believe it was named for its founder. But the odd part of the story is that it's my name as well. My mother was half Spanish—born Florentina de la Cruz; and I'm called after her: Henry de la Cruz Gardiner."

"Well, that is queer," said Lettice, for once with conviction.

"Isn't it? There aren't so many traces left of the Spanish occupation; I call it something of a coincidence that that should have survived, and that I should come on it—should actually take over and settle down in the house built by my namesake. Of course it's a not uncommon name in Spain, but it does set one thinking. And see here, too." He dragged her across to the tower. The gateway was half ruinous; one of the jambs had fallen, bringing some of the stones along with it, and others seemed ready to follow. "No, this isn't war's alarms, though as a matter of fact I have found a cannon ball embedded in the barn. Jules backed the engine into it the other day. This lintel's all cock-eye, but you can still see the cross and initials—can you?—carved on the end here." He was tracing out the mark.

"Take care!" said Lettice suddenly.

She was too late. The stone above—perhaps he had brushed against it; at any rate, it settled down, quietly and inexorably, grinding his hand between itself and the block below. Lettice's arm sprang out; she could be quick on occasion, but he was quicker still. "No! keep off!" he cried out, instantly fending her off, shouldering her out of the way; and in the same breath he inserted the point of his stick into the crevice. A very slight leverage, and the upper stone tipped and fell to the ground, in a shower of dust and rubble. He drew away his hand and stepped back. "They ought to have that seen to, I'll warn madame," he said. "It's jolly dangerous, with those kids about."

"You've hurt yourself," said Lettice.

"Yes, I've done myself proud this time," he said, and

coolly put his hand behind his back. "Don't look at it, it isn't pretty. I'll cut in and get some warm water out of madame, and do it up."

He turned and walked off to the house. Unfortunately, in turning he forgot that his hand was behind him, and Lettice saw it. It was dripping blood; he left his trail across the golden straw to the door. Lettice stayed where she was. She was not going where she was not wanted. She felt a little sick; not for the sight of blood, but in sympathy with him. She had seen him change color. Yet he was cool enough; she could hear his voice inside, answering madame's exclamation as lightly as ever. Presently he came out again, with a white-bandaged paw, and a face not much less pallid than the linen.

"Thanks so much for not fussing," he said. "I had a gay ten minutes with madame; I thought she was going to embrace me. Let's get on home now, do you mind? All this bobbery has taken the dickens of a time, and I've masses of things still to do before dinner."

Lettice fell in beside him without a word. For once in her life, she walked fast. Gardiner was silent too, twirling his stick in his left hand instead of the right. They had reached the hill of the crucifix, and were descending the orchard, before Lettice opened her lips.

"You won't be able to write your letters. How will you manage?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Make shift with my left hand, I suppose."

"You'd better let me do them for you."

"It's nearly eight o'clock. Time for you to have your supper and go to by-by."

"I don't always go to bed at nine," said Lettice.

"Would you really be so good as to do it, for once?"

"Of course."

"Servidor de usted, señorita," said Gardiner, "que sus piés besa — your servant, madam, who kisses your feet: I don't know why I want to talk Spanish to you, but I undoubtedly do — I shall be inexpressibly grateful."

CHAPTER XII

ALL IN THE AIR

Hark! I am called; my little spirit, see,
Sits in a foggy cloud, and stays for me.

Macbeth.

SYDNEY WANDESFORDE, Denis's partner, was a big, heavy-featured, heavily built man, whose appearance nobody could have called aristocratic. Plutocratic was more like it. There had been patent pills on the distaff side of his ancestry, and unfortunately he had taken after them, instead of after the belted earls of the paternal line. He had, however, the easy manners, the clean movements, the soft voice of his class, and if he was plain he looked able.

He had never got beyond surnames with Denis; which meant that he had never met the soft side of that pugnacious Irish tongue. Denis was Haus-engel, Strassteufel, a lamb to his friends, a lion abroad. There were moments when Wandesforde thought him the most irritating man on the face of the globe; but he bore with it, never coming to a quarrel, because he liked and valued his partner too much to let him go. At the time of their first meeting, Denis had spent every penny he possessed, and had nothing to put into the partnership except his brains, and an aeroplane which at that date (1907) couldn't be induced to quit the ground. Yet the agreement was drawn as between equals, and Wandesforde claimed not more but less control than in an ordinary partnership. Why? Because he was shrewd enough to see that Denis would never work as a subordinate; and because, as aforesaid, he valued his partner too much to give him any excuse for throwing up his work and going off in a huff of outraged independence, as he would have done on the least provocation — so sensitive is an Ulster-

man's pride! "Give him his head? Of course I do!" he said with half a laugh to his brother, who had expressed some mild surprise. "Eccentricities of genius, what? Oh yes, he is a genius, head and shoulders above the rest of the crowd; and a nice chap too, and abso-lutely straight. Can't help liking him. I admit he's a bit trying at times, but it's worth it. I'd rather work with him than with any man I know!"

Now Denis saw the position as clearly as his partner; he knew that he could do pretty much as he liked, that Wandesforde, though he paid the piper, would carefully refrain from calling the tune. Therefore, having a conscience, he felt bound to do of his own accord most of the things his partner wanted, but wouldn't ask. All which preamble leads us to the fact that Wandesforde, not gathering from his letter that Denis abhorred the idea of teaching Dorothea, wrote back warmly approving of the plan. He had taken up flying in the first instance to amuse himself; but times were hard, Dent-de-lion had been expensive, and why shouldn't he recoup himself, as others had done, by laying out an aerodrome and starting a flying school? The idea had been simmering in his head for some time, and he poured it all out as soon as Denis gave him an opening. Afterwards, when he saw how the land lay, he retracted; but he had shown his wishes so plainly that Denis, ready to gnash his teeth for rage, felt bound to sink his own feelings and accept Dorothea as a pupil. In the net he had laid privily was his own foot taken.

The lessons were deferred, however, until after the Birmingham race; in which Denis met the luck he had expected. Over the first part of the course he made better time than any of the other competitors. Between Polesworth and Walsall he had to come down, with valve trouble. He set it right, and went to restart the engine by "swinging the prop," while half-a-dozen laborers held on to the tail of the machine. Unfortunately they were so much surprised by the sudden pull that they let go; Denis had barely time to get out of the way of the murderous whizzing blades. Then

followed a wildly funny scene, the monoplane charging about the field with devilish energy, while Denis and his six penitent assistants pelted after it. In the end it butted its nose into the bank, broke the propeller, and put itself out of the race.

"I told you what would come of flyin' on a Friday," said Denis in self-righteous gloom to his partner, over one of those strange meals which pilots learn to eat in village pubs. No one should fly who isn't physically fit, so presumably their digestions are equal to the strain. This meal had begun with beer and bacon, and gone on to buns — three-days-old currant buns.

Wandesforde, with his wife, had been following the race in a car. His arm was still in a sling, and his looks had not been improved by a blow which had knocked his front teeth crooked. He was patiently mincing up his bun with knife and fork; bite into it he could not.

"Well, dash it all, if a race is run on a Friday you have to fly it on a Friday, don't you?" he said, annoyed. "I wouldn't have let you in if I could possibly have held the joy-stick. I'm not superstitious about the days of the week myself."

"No, you've had smashes on every one of the seven, haven't you?"

Bearing this with an effort, Wandesforde gave up his bun as a bad job and consoled himself with a cigar. "I suppose now you'll go back to Dent-de-lion and take on Miss O'Connor?" he asked, by way of changing the subject.

"Teach her to commit suicide expensively," said the morose Denis. "She'll never make a pilot; anybiddy can see that. Women haven't it in them. Any old thing that's idiotic they'll do — start without fillin' up the tank, as soon as not!"

The sting of this speech was that Wandesforde, not being always as careful as his partner deemed desirable, had recently made this very omission himself, and paid for it by crashing a friend's favorite bus. The silence was broken by a small subdued sound of amusement from Mrs. Wandes-

forde, which consoled her husband in proportion as it annoyed Denis. He scowled at her through his eyeglass, and then, muttering something about the monoplane, stalked out of the room.

"Lord!" said Wandesforde, getting up and squaring his broad shoulders against the mantelpiece with an audible sigh of relief, "he's in a pretty rank temper, what? I hoped he hadn't heard about Wyatt's Avro. Never knew him so cut up about a smash before!"

His wife, a piece of silvery transparent loveliness, shook her fair head. "Not the smash," she pronounced, oracular. "Miss O'Connor!"

Meanwhile Dorothea had established herself in a furnished cottage at Bredon, with an old governess as companion-chaperon. Miss Byrd had been living in an alms-house on ten shillings a week, when her half-forgotten pupil sought her out. It should be noted in passing that if Dorothea pursued her enemies with vengeance, she also pursued her friends with gratitude. More than this; she could be generous even to her enemies. Against her lawyer's advice, she had insisted on making her uncle an allowance. "I'm not going to be a pig, because he was!" she said. Vengeance and revenge are, in fact, very different, as different as the lion and the hyena. But this is by the way; and indeed at this time Dorothea's vengeance had dropped out of sight. Just as she flung herself on Gardiner, so she had now attacked Denis, without definite plan, on the opportunist theory that something would turn up; and something had, but not what she expected. Her own youth lifted its head. She had come to exploit the aeroplanes for her vengeance; and lo and behold! she forgot her vengeance in the aeroplanes.

Denis had adapted the 1911 model for use as a school machine, and Dorothea began in the usual way by "rolling" — i.e., taxi-ing on the ground. Most pupils "break wood" during this process, for an aeroplane will run any way but straight, preferring to curl round like a puppy after its own tail. But Dorothea had by nature that automatic sixth sense

of machinery which most people acquire only by practice. She would have learned to fly in a week, representing some three or four hours actually in the air, if Denis had given her full time; but he would not. Three days out of the six he kept sacred to his work. On the remaining three Dorothea and her car appeared at Dent-de-lion whenever the weather was favorable, and often when it wasn't. There were many rough days that September.

At first Denis found her an unmitigated nuisance. It was bad enough to put up with her when it was calm; but on a day of storm and tempest, with a fifty-mile gale — then to be interrupted by rosy-hopeful youth clamoring for a lesson — it was intolerable! Nature had never designed Denis for a teacher. He would have crushed a stupid pupil. He was hard even on Dorothea, when she failed to know what he hadn't told her. But she was so eager, pliant, uncrushable, so ardently in earnest, so reverent in attention, so insinuating in meekness: in a word, she flattered him so sweetly that he began, unconsciously at first, yet surely, he began to enjoy teaching her.

Even if there had been no question of Trent, Dorothea and Harry Gardiner would never have made friends. They had nothing in common. She, a little materialist, living in her feelings, caring not a rap for the pleasures of the mind or fancy; he, a restless thinker, imaginative, uneven in grain, too close in sympathy with nature to be wholly civilized. That strain of wildness would keep him always solitary; but Dorothea, though she had never yet had a chance to find herself, was essentially a home woman. She wanted to adore, to be ruled by, to mother her man in the good old-fashioned way. All that would simply have bored Gardiner. To Denis, on the other hand, it was the ideal of married life.

They sat side by side, his hands over hers, guiding the aeroplane, and he forgot she was a woman. Not till then did her womanhood begin to make its impression. She had attracted Gardiner, the man of reason, through his senses, she attracted Denis, the man of instinct, through his reason. He liked the quick answer of her mind to his own.

Then one day she met with an accident ; her hand was grazed by the propeller. Had it struck her full it would have shorn off her fingers in a moment, and even as it was she was badly bruised. Denis ordered her to see a doctor. Dorothea, pale but valiant, wanted to go on with her lesson.

"It's the first fine day we've had this week," she pleaded. "I shall never, never fly if I stop for every miserable little trifle!"

"I shouldn't think of lettin' you," said Denis, grim and peremptory. "You've broken one of the small bones, as likely as not."

"That I haven't!" retorted Dorothea, giving the hand a vigorous shake to emphasize her words. Denis seized her arm.

"Do not do that! Don't you feel pain?"

"Yes, of course I do, but I can't be bothered to think about it when I'm enjoying myself, can I?"

She stamped her foot, so absurdly enraged that Denis could not help laughing. Her unceremonious fortitude appealed to him, just as her pretended sensibility, when she cut her foot, had appealed to Gardiner. Odd that in each case the quality that drew them was the precise opposite of what each really asked for in a woman!

Dorothea had to give way; she went to a doctor, and was forbidden to use the hand. This cut her off from her car as well as from flying, for if she couldn't drive herself she wouldn't be driven. "Sit by and see a hateful hired chauffeur doing my work? No, thank you!" said she. So she sulked at Bredon, and Denis went back to his desk. He had "scrapped" the old seaplane, lock, stock and barrel, and was working on a new design, "a boat that would fly rather than an aeroplane that would float," of his favorite monoplane type. Denis had long wanted to build a monoplane which should be for the English air service what Blériots and Moranes were for the French, or Taubes for the German; and as he wished to show his new model at the Aero Exhibition in the spring, he had his work cut out. The fever of invention was upon him. Yet he missed his

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tiresome, charming pupil. In the brief lucid intervals when he came to the surface, he was conscious of a vague discomfort which neither beef nor bed availed to soothe. Her accident and the delay were giving time for his feelings to mature. Gardiner, who was interested in his own mental processes, would soon have found himself out; Denis, a stranger to self-consciousness, was blind as any well-brought-up young lady of the fifties.

Dorothea came back at last unexpectedly. After leaving his lunch to get cold, and then bolting it in five minutes, Denis had rushed back to his desk to finish a calculation. He was writing the last figures when a car turned in at the gates, and he lifted his head with a frown, which changed suddenly into a smile of pleasure. Well he knew that gay little tune on the horn, the sound of that fresh young voice in the porch! Down went his pen, and out he hurried to greet her, with an eagerness which surprised himself.

"Here's your bad penny again, you see!" she cried, coming in with the scent of the wind on her suit and the rose of it in her cheeks. "Aren't you sick to see me? Old Turner said this morning I might use my hand, so I came straight off. But what *have* you been doing to yourself? You look half starved — doesn't he, Birdie? Have you had any lunch? If you haven't it's very wrong of you, and I shall just stand over you till it's gone — do you hear?"

Denis, laughing, lingered to shake hands with Miss Byrd, who always satisfied the proprieties by escorting her young friend, before following his impetuous pupil into the parlor. Dorothea was scornfully inspecting the remains of the meal.

"H'm! One sausage — I know it can't be more, for Rogers never gives you more than seven, at the outside, to the pound — it's not half enough for you. This room's hatefully uncomfortable, too," she added, frowning round with eyes which saw it all anew. Dorothea was blind to beauty, but wide awake to comfort, especially somebody else's comfort. "I should like to talk to that Simpson woman. I'd soon make her sit up! I think she neglects

you shamefully. You're looking quite pale — isn't he, Birdie? — and I know it's all her fault. I've no use at all for a woman who can't keep her own people comfy!"

It was a novel experience for Denis to be scolded for neglecting himself. "I assure you Miss Simpson's guiltless," he said, smiling. "I've had a bit of a rush lately, that's all. I've not been able to get out these last few days."

"Well, you're coming out with me this afternoon, or I'll know the reason why. I can't have you looking like this," retorted Dorothea, nodding her decision; and then, with a sudden beguiling change, clasping both hands over his arm: "You're going to let me do straights on my own to-day, aren't you? You almost promised you would, last time!"

Denis looked down on her hands, as though he found them a very pleasing adornment to his sleeve. "We'll see," he said, and from that he would not budge, for all her coaxing. He was inordinately cautious in his tuition. They left Miss Byrd tucked up by the fire with a book, and Denis went down to the hangars, while Dorothea got into her flying kit. He was never tired of dinning into his pupil's ears the duty of prudence, and certainly he set the example himself. When Dorothea appeared at the sheds, in her tan leather coat and leggings and safety helmet, she found her instructor tuning up the machine, and had to wait as patiently as she might till he had done.

The morning until ten o'clock had been white and chill with one of those luminous, snowy September fogs, which clear off into noons of sapphire. The sky was astoundingly blue, the meadow insolently green, the sheds all hard-edged, vivid, with keen black shadows. In the full blaze of sunshine stood the monoplane, tall in front where the long brown blades of the propeller cleared the ground, sloping down towards the fin-like tail planes, and spreading its pale wings in curves not unlike those of the gulls which sailed by, calling and fishing over the marshes.

Dorothea climbed into her seat, Denis took his place beside her, the men behind let go, and off they went, skimming fast and faster over the grass, gaining speed and power for

soaring. The elevator tilted, and they parted from the earth, the moment imperceptible; only the country, which had lain ahead, spread out suddenly below them like a carpet. There were the green marshes, ruled out like a chess-board with glistening waterways, and bordered with the dark blue sea: the farm, and the sheds, and the outbuildings, all like toys made of cardboard and glittering tin.

After circling over the aerodrome to get his height, Denis turned his back on the coast and flew inland. As they passed, the great farm horses plunged and fidgeted, the laborers stood still in the fields, peering up from under their hands, the cottagers ran out into the road to watch them overhead. Some said: "Well, I wouldn't be up in one of them things for a thousand pounds!" and others: "Silly fools! serve 'em right if they break their necks!" The Englishman, in fact, received the novelty as he receives any strange thing or person, in the spirit summed once and for all by *Punch*. Not that Denis had any right to grumble. Except with regard to his work, he was just as conservative, just as ready to heave his half-brick as any Bill among them.

They flew to Canterbury, and turned, banking in a steep curve, to shoot back over the way they had come. They were five thousand feet up, and the wind was ferocious; it seemed to press the breath back down their throats, to wrench at the flesh on their faces. Much Dorothea cared! On that homeward flight she was allowed, for the first time, to guide the aeroplane herself. Denis kept his hands ready to resume control, in case of a slip, but he was not needed; she held the pillar till the time came to switch off the engine and glide in a long, long slant towards the landing ground. B-rr, the motor purred again, as the monoplane cocked up her tail, like a bird, to "flatten out" before alighting. The landing wheels took off the shock, and they ran smoothly over the grass till the momentum was exhausted.

Denis stayed at the hangars to see the machine housed. When he came back to the house he found his pupil waiting for him on the steps of the porch. She had taken off her

helmet and her leather coat, and wore the same rough tweeds in which she had wandered about the woods of the Semois. Her skirt was short enough to show a pair of neat brown ankles, as well as the brown shoes below them, and her hair hung down her back in a yard and a quarter of pigtail. She said she couldn't coil it under the helmet. Her eyes were sparkling, and her cheeks were pink, and she propped herself against the white pillar, first on one foot, then on the other, with the long-legged, supple awkwardness of a schoolgirl. Strange how the years had fallen away, how little mark had been left by her marriage, even by motherhood!

"I did it all right, didn't I?" she demanded, naïvely eager. "I didn't make any bad breaks?"

"Not a break!" Denis assured her.

"Really? Truly? Will you let me do a figure of eight next time? I know I could!"

"We'll see when next time comes."

Dorothea looked exceedingly naughty, like Geraldine caught stealing the cream—the simile was Denis's own. "It's coming again to-morrow!" she announced daringly.

Denis shook his head, smiling at her. "No, it's not."

"Ah, do let me! I've wasted so much time with the weather, and then this hateful hand, and I do so want to learn—I *can't* wait till Saturday!"

"I'm sorry to disappoint such ardor, but I'm afraid you must."

"Why? You know it may change any day now into the equinoctial gales. I think you might leave your old seaplane for once. I've never asked you before. *Do!*"

Denis, standing below her on the path, continued to smile provokingly and to shake his head. It amused him to see her stamp her foot, which she did punctually, with a thunderous frown.

"I think you're *most* unkind. It's not your duty, it's your pleasure you're thinking of. You *like* those miserable calculations, and that's why you won't come. I *hate* the seaplane!"

"There might be some point in your strictures," said Denis, teasing her, "if I happened to be workin' at the seaplane to-morrow."

"What are you going to do, then, if not that?"

"I'm dinin' Wandesforde in town."

"O-oh," said Dorothea, undecided between storm and sunshine. "Then I hate Mr. Wandesforde!" she concluded viciously.

"You hate so many things, don't you?"

Again she was almost ready to sulk like an offended baby; but no — out shone the sun, and the clouds fled away. "Well, I do," she owned, laughing back at him, "of course I do! So would anybody who wasn't a perfect frog. It's only cold-blooded people like you and Lettice who are tolerant. Besides, I love heaps of things to make up. I hate the seaplane and I hate Mr. Wandesforde, but I love the monoplane and I love you —"

It would have been nothing, nothing, if she had not pointed her words by stopping dead and turning scarlet. Denis, puzzled, gazed at her with his honest eyes; and then, like the falling of a curtain, saw what her confusion meant, both to her and to himself. He stepped forward impulsively, putting out his hands. Dorothea pressed back against the pillar, glancing desperately from side to side; then, striking them away, she turned and darted in at the open door, like a rabbit into its burrow.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE NAIL DRIVES OUT ANOTHER

I looked and saw your heart
In the shadow of your eyes,
As the seeker sees the gold
In the shadow of the stream.

Three Shadows.

THERE is a legend which says that September is the month of the fading leaf. Townsmen may fancy so, looking at their own starved avenues, which begin to shrivel and strip themselves as early as July; but in the country the massive woods (except that an elm here and there hangs out a single crocus-yellow spray) keep the somber green of late summer to the very end of the month. Then, as the days pass, first the lime "strips to the cold and standeth naked above her yellow attire." The horse-chestnuts on some night of frost let drop all their fans in a rustling heap. The woodland paths are crisp with fawn-colored oak leaves. Last of all, in mid-November, the elms loosen to the wind and the rain those faint clouds of green and greenish-gold which have rounded the shape of their limbs, till all the wet meadows are strewn with them; and it is winter.

At Rochehaut it was September still, late September. Gardiner, at leisure after the summer rush, had been to his bank at Bouillon, and, instead of returning by the *vicinal*, had chosen to walk back over the hills through Botassart. This route brought him past the crucifix. He had not been there since the grand explosion, and it cost him an effort to go back; but he refused to be sentimental, or allow a beautiful thing to be spoiled for him by fancies. There he lay then on the grass, smoking and dreaming.

It seemed long, long since that summer night; so long

that he could look back now, on it and on Dorothea, as part of the past. Heavens! how she had hurt him! There was that time as a boy, when he tumbled waist-deep into a vat of scalding liquid at some chemical works; he could compare his feelings only to that violent assault of pain. Yes, she had hurt him abominably; the pain of his crushed hand had been by contrast a relief and a distraction. But the wound was on the surface; and, though he scarcely knew it himself, already it was beginning to heal. There was no poison in it. His passion for Dorothea had been effectually cauterized; he thought of her now without either resentment or desire. He was profoundly sorry; sorrier for Dorothea O'Connor than even for Mrs. Trent. This pity, oddly enough, confirmed him in impenitence. "I did her a good turn when I cleared that fellow out of her road," he said to himself with inverted satisfaction. "If he'd lived long enough for her to find him out, there'd have been *la de Dios es Cristo!*"

Three days of pale still sunshine had closed in threatening gloom. The grassy hill of the crucifix was burnt putty-color; the hill of forests opposite was olive-somber; the valley fumed with tawny vapors, breathing down from the gloom of the sky, and up from the dark current of the river. All was still, grave, overcast, till the sun found his sunset crevice in the clouds and split them, overflowing in long lines of liquid gold between iron-heavy bars. Splendid transparent fan-rays of light and dark alternate streamed up the sky; they rimmed vague forms of mist with burning wire, they filled the empty blue with bronze and golden vapors; the whole vault of heaven was on fire, the wet brown hills flamed back responsive glory.

Gardiner, susceptible to every earth influence, found his senses flooded with that golden exhilaration. Vague mists of thought took shape in its light; he knew now that that name on the lintel of the farm was not a mere coincidence. When he first saw the Bellevue, "Why, I've been here before," he had said to himself, with a thrill of startled recognition. And now, "I belong here," he added, half aloud,

with a touch of solemnity, as though the spoken word must be irrevocable. Old ties were dear; but he knew in his heart, his body knew, that the wild Semois down there in the valley was more to him than the Darenth of his boyhood. This was his home.

Bringing his dazzled eyes to earth, he saw that a figure had detached itself from the orchards of the Bellevue, and was slowly mounting the hill. One person only would climb like that, with so many divagations to avoid steep places, and so many halts to admire the view — or could it be to get her breath? It was Lettice.

Since his accident, now five weeks ago, Gardiner had seen a good deal of Miss Smith. His hand had been unexpectedly troublesome; indeed he was only now beginning to use it. Meantime he had made use of Lettice as his amanuensis, repaying her services by refusing to allow her to settle her bill. "No, I am *not* going to take that money," he said, energetically nodding towards the pile of notes she had deposited on his table. "I'll pitch it into the fire if you leave it there. Also I shall wire to town for a regular secretary. Pick it up and take it away." Lettice did not like it in the very least; but very slowly and very stubbornly she did pick the money up and return it to her purse. Nor was her temper soothed when Gardiner looked at her direct, with a glint in his eye, and added, "I know you wind Denis round your little finger, but I am not Denis. Two can play at being obstinate, *savez-vous?*" Still, she continued to act as his secretary; until by the end of the month she knew his methods and his business almost as well as he did himself.

It was after this episode that she began to play with him, admitting him to rank as an intimate; and that he began to discover what it was that Denis loved in those velvet touches. But he was more uncertain than Denis — he was not to be run by formula; he would turn unexpectedly, and parry, and strike back. Once or twice, too, especially at first, when he was acting the urbane and cheerful host, he found her eyes fixed upon him. They were instantly with-

drawn; but he knew she knew he was suffering, and oddly enough he did not resent it. Oddly, be it understood, because Gardiner was by no means fond of sympathy. His instinct when hard hit was to cover up the wound and keep it hidden from the world, and especially from his friends. Yet it seemed he did not mind Lettice. And now, though he saw she was making for the crucifix, to disturb his regal solitude, he did not stir.

She had not seen him. She plodded on without looking up, and presently was hidden in a fold of the hill. When she emerged again, it was within ten yards of the crucifix and that lazy, smiling figure. She stopped short; one could almost hear her spirit say "Oh!" though her lips were silent. Her first impulse obviously was to beat a retreat (Gardiner chuckled, he had known it would be!), but she thought better of it, and came on. After surveying the heap of stones, she chose the one comfortable place, settled herself, and got out the inevitable green tablecloth. Lettice made great play with that tablecloth.

Since she would not speak, Gardiner did.

"I didn't know you'd found your way up here."

"Why, you told me about it yourself."

"Do you like it better than your wood pile in the forest?"

Lettice paused in the act of threading her needle to look round on the brown and gold of hills and woods and sky. "Yes," said she; and if she had raved for an hour she could have expressed no more. Comfortable silence fell between them. Lettice stitched, and Gardiner smoked, and in the west the sunset flared in citron, amber, saffron, bronze, and a thousand shades of glory. In the east a scroll of cloud reared dazzling sunny heights of snow against dazzling blue. Lettice's needle slackened; it came to a standstill.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Gardiner.

"I haven't any."

"I thought you were composing a poem."

Insults of insults! Lettice looked volumes of reproach.

"I was *not*," said she.

"But you do write poetry."

"Who told you so?"

"Who do you suppose? Denis has told me quite a lot about you. Hasn't he told you a lot about me?"

"Yes; but it wasn't all of it true."

Gardiner burst out laughing. "Well, that is good! How do you know?"

"Oh, it's, it's — it's obvious," said Lettice, with an exasperated wave of the hand to help out her meaning. She began to sew very fast. Gardiner contemplated her with a broad smile; but presently it faded, and he turned over and lay plucking at the grass.

"Did Miss O'Connor leave her address with you?"

Lettice shook her head.

"She went off in such a hurry!"

Gardiner opened his mouth to speak, and checked himself for a garrulous fool. He did not know why he had mentioned Dorothea at all. A moment later the impulse came again, and he found himself, to his surprise, telling Lettice the very thing he had decided not to mention. "Rather a queer thing about that young lady," he remarked lightly. "I found out — to be exact, she hurled the fact in my teeth — that she wasn't a Miss, and that O'Connor wasn't her name. She was a widow — a Mrs. Trent."

"Mrs. Trent? What, the, the —"

"Oh, you know about her, do you? Yes, the Mrs. Trent of Easedale. She's firmly persuaded that I killed her husband. I believe she came over here simply and solely in order to worm some sort of confession out of me."

He stopped, amazed at himself. Then he looked at Lettice. If deep unaffected interest can pull confidences out of a man, here was his excuse. Why, she was all eyes and ears!

"So that was it!" she said. "That was who she was!"

"You don't mean to tell me you knew about this before?"

"No, no, not her name. But I knew she didn't much like you."

"The dickens you did! Did she say so?"

"No, I, I — I sort of gathered it."

"I begin to think what Denis said about you was true," Gardiner remarked after a pause.

"What did Denis say about me?"

"That you could see through a flight of stairs and a deal door."

"I don't know *what* you mean."

"You wouldn't, it's out of Dickens," said Gardiner, with a laugh which hid considerable perturbation. So she had guessed that, had she, before he knew it himself? What was there she did not guess? He began to feel helplessly transparent. Yet again he was surprised to find he did not hate her for intruding. Lettice could pick her way among sensibilities like a cat among china, and she neither misunderstood nor misjudged. There were episodes in his life which he would have been ashamed to show to Denis. He could have shown them every one to Lettice, unmarried girl though she was, and with no experience of the rough and tumble of life. Somehow one never thought of Lettice as a girl. He looked up at her. She had dropped her work and sat motionless, her eyes fixed on the sunset. In nature as in human nature, Lettice looked to the limit of sight, and beyond, to the city of God. It was that distant view which gave her the perspective for things near. While Gardiner was making these reflections, she turned her head suddenly and surprised him with a question:

"Does Denis know about Mrs. Trent?"

"I should say not. I haven't told him."

"I think you'd better."

It was so unlike Lettice to offer advice that he stared in surprise.

"Why?"

"He ought to know."

"I don't want to go into that business again," said Gardiner. "He did hate it all so desperately — no, I don't want to rake it up again. Nor do I see any necessity. What does it matter?"

"Would you mind if I told him?"

"Why the dickens are you so keen?"

She hesitated. She found it chronically hard to put her thoughts into speech, and in this case there were reservations to be made. Gardiner took the words out of her mouth.

"You don't mean you think she'd go for him too?"

Lettice nodded. "She meant to get a confession out of one or the other of you."

"Oh, my Lord!" said Gardiner, and caught himself up. "But if there's nothing to confess?"

A flash went over Lettice's face. Was it conceivable that she had guessed even that last thing? No, it wasn't, Gardiner decided hastily, that was beyond her, she couldn't possibly know. For an instant he thought of telling her himself, but caution, habit, above all self-derision held him back. He blurt out that damaging truth to a chance acquaintance? He wasn't such a fool!—All this passed through his mind in the instant between his question and her reply.

"Well, she didn't give you much of a time while she was trying to find out, did she?"

"No; but—oh, she *couldn't* try that game on again, it would be too beastly low down, with a man like Denis! Besides, he isn't taking any, he simply hates women. . . . Look here, tell me exactly what you know, do you mind? What makes you so certain she meant to go for him?"

Lettice drew a long breath. Her explanation, when it came, ran clear and straight. Indeed, her thought was always lucid; it was the words that failed.

"It was that last day before she went. She began by telling me about herself and how unhappy she had been; and then she let out that there was some man she hated; and then she began asking questions about you and Denis, coupling you together, do you see?—but so that you couldn't help guessing it was you she'd been talking about. One thing she asked was whether Denis would tell a lie to save a friend. And then Denis himself came up, and they talked flying; and she said she should go to Bredon some day and see the aeroplanes."

"You think she really meant business?"

"Yes, I do."

"Pleasant," said Gardiner, tugging at his mustache, with a sort of hard restraint. "If she exploits Denis as she did me, he'll enjoy himself. Yes, I shall be very much obliged if you'll write to him. He'll take it better from you than from me."

"I wish I'd known before," said Lettice, folding up her work.

"Oh, it's all right so far, she hasn't turned up at Bredon yet. I heard from Denis this morning."

"Yes, but don't you see if she did go she'd be sure to tell him not to tell you?"

He did see, and felt sick. It cost him an effort to lie still. But he pulled himself together; that last secret, at least, she should not read. What to say, then? He would not confess, but equally he would not lie to her. He found something which was neither lie, confession, nor equivocation, but a piece of plain fact.

"If she ever does get hold of the truth about Trent, she'll be uncommonly sorry she tried to find out."

Then he discovered that Lettice was neither looking at nor thinking of him.

"I hope she won't get it out of Denis," she said. "I hope you'll be in time to prevent that."

The words were mild; the spirit, not so. Gardiner was shamed out of his self-absorption. He saw Lettice's love for her cousin, roused in his defense; and he saw, too, with her, Denis tricked into betraying his friend. Why, he would never forgive himself!

"My Lord, yes!" he said with unexpected gravity. "That would be a worse business than anything she's done or could do to me."

CHAPTER XIV

A TWO-EDGED SWORD

He looked at her, as a lover can;

She looked at him, as one who awakes.

The Statue and the Bust.

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.— PROVERBS.

IN his salad days, a long time ago, Denis had fallen in love with the daughter of a respectable suburban fishmonger, after tumbling out of the sky on the roof of her house. The young lady's parents were rich but honest; the young lady herself — well, she had an extremely pretty face, which occupied Denis to the exclusion of a blue and yellow sports coat and a large string of pearls. His love dream lasted six weeks; then he fell out of his aeroplane again and broke his handsome nose, or was supposed to have done so, and Miss Tyrrell broke the engagement. "I c-couldn't bear you with a broken nose!" she wept. Whatever Denis broke, it was not his heart. When he looked back on the episode, it was with devout and wondering thankfulness; but he preferred not to look back on it at all.

This was his sole experience of the tender passion. In his single-minded and laborious life there had been no room for more; even Nina Tyrrell had been sandwiched between two flying accidents. Denis was at bottom a simple soul. He had three main interests — his religion, his aeroplanes, his friends; and they were all bound up together by a child-like faith. He believed in others because his own heart was pure. It was this bloom of innocence which Gardiner loved in his friend, and which both he and Lettice were tender to protect; and it was this which made his feeling for Dorothea at once so beautiful, and so vulnerable.

He took the revelation very simply, very seriously, with reverence and awe; among other primitive virtues, Denis had a fine stock of awe. Love was to him a sacrament, a gift direct from heaven; he carried it in his heart like a jewel almost too precious for human hands to touch, and gave humble thanks to God. A good old-fashioned churchman, Denis had been accustomed to "say his prayers" night and morning, walking in a decent English soul-silence the rest of the day; but this new gratitude transcended all rules and overflowed in ceaseless praise. Nobody, he was certain, had ever felt like this before. He was happy — happier than it had ever entered his head to imagine, in sunshine which turned all the gray of life to gold.

All that day he could settle to nothing, but mooned about the house, getting in the way of Miss Simpson, who had planned to turn out his room. Next day, in town, he looked at Wandesforde the married man with new curiosity. He did not in the least want to unbosom himself; but he would have liked to extract confidences from somebody who had been through it all before. Wandesforde, however, was not given to making confidences, and if ever he had been driven into speech his partner was the last man he would have chosen to receive his outpourings. He put down Denis's unusual silence to his liver, and genially advised him to take more exercise — that venerable joke, which always seems so good to the maker and so poor to the recipient!

That night Denis lay awake, building castles in the air. Dorothea had told him all her sad little story as far as her marriage, one squally day when they were sheltering in the hangar; he set up in his heart a shrine of protective love and reverence and worshiped her there, his little lady of the sorrows — Dorothea, with a heart full of black hate! Yet Denis was not blind. He saw one side of her clearly enough, and was ready to own with tender indulgence that she had plenty of endearing imperfections, of small gray faults; but of the other side, the dark half of the moon, she had shown him nothing, and how was he to divine it? With him, indeed, she was what he believed her: true to her true self,

since but for her starved girlhood Dorothea would never have learned to hate. He scarcely dared hope she loved him yet, though he had a shy confidence that he would win her in the end; but he meant to ask her at once, that very day when she came for her lesson. He was up and out at six o'clock, among pearly mists, and saw the sun rise in rose and gold over meadows spread with the thin silver of the frost. Then he came in to breakfast, took up his letters, and met his first check. There was a note from Miss Byrd to say they could not come.

She wrote for Dorothea, whose hand was troubling her again; perhaps she had strained it yesterday; at any rate, she thought best not to use it at present. But would Mr. Merion-Smith come to tea with them to-morrow after church instead? She hoped this would be convenient and that they might have the pleasure of his company, and she was his very sincerely, Mary Anne Byrd. Denis's face, which had darkened, cleared again; after all, it was not such a bad thing. Better say what he had to say in a drawing-room than shout it through the hum of a propeller.

He went to afternoon church, and listened to the Evangelical vicar's sermon on Christian evidences, which he seemed to rest mainly on the fact that there have been martyrs for the faith (a proposition over which Denis knit his brows, though he could not imagine that the congregation then present was liable to have its faith upset by faulty logic); and when the choir of little girls recited the General Thanksgiving, he recited it with them, in great seriousness and devotion. Coming out into the sunny white road, with the ink-blue sea on one hand, the grayish cliff grass on the other, he walked down to Dorothea's bungalow — the one bungalow of Bredon, which he already knew sufficiently well, having lived there for several years himself. The car was at the door; he paused to look over it before he rang the bell.

Miss Byrd received him in the drawing-room, and for the first half-hour entertained him alone; a tall, slim woman with a complexion of wrinkled ivory, gentle and dignified and intelligent. As a teacher she had been subject to storms

of nervous anger, for which she was not too proud to apologize, even to a pupil; it was an incident of this sort which had stamped her indelibly in Dorothea's affections. Always a little shy of Denis, to-day she seemed in a state of nervous tremor; her hands were shaking as she arranged and rearranged the cozy, and wondered for the tenth time what could be keeping Dot. Denis, who had one manner for the mighty and another for the humble and meek, set himself to soothe her alarms. He was just succeeding when the door unclosed and the truant swept in.

"Am I very frightfully late?" she inquired unconcernedly. "So sorry; having only one hand makes you awkward, you know. Do you mind doing this for me, Birdie?"

She stood bending her graceful head while Miss Byrd settled the rose point of her collar. She was wearing a velvet dress, very rich, very sumptuous, cut open at the throat and bordered with sable fur. Round her neck went a gold chain, rough links nearly an inch across, hanging to her knees and looking barbarously heavy. She sank into a chair, and there was the gleam of a golden shoe, a Cinderella slipper with jeweled straps crossing on the arch of a silken instep. What a transformation! But the greater change was in her manner.

"Have you been to church?" she asked. "How pious of you! I haven't; but then I'm not pious, you know. I went for a joy-ride instead. My hand? Oh yes, thanks, I managed all right. I generally do manage to do what I want to," she added, spreading out a slender hand with the diamonds upon it which Lettice had admired long ago. She looked up at Denis through her lashes. "No, I didn't want to come yesterday; not particularly; wasn't that sad? But I did want you to come here this afternoon—"

"That's all right, since here I am," Denis interrupted, laughing at her. He put her off for an instant, but only for an instant; she recovered herself, and swept on:

"And I'll tell you why: because I wanted a real heart-to-heart talk, without any aeroplanes or things to interrupt. I've a bone to pick with you."

“A bone to pick, have you?”

“A big, big bone. Another lump of sugar, please, Birdie — yes, that little fella will do; I shan’t let you make tea if you don’t give me enough sugar. Why didn’t you ever tell us that exciting story about Mr. Gardiner?”

She leaned back among her cushions, stirring her cup, watching Denis with those dark eyes full of overt insolence and covert eagerness. But Denis was not noticing subtleties of expression; this time she had got home.

“What excitin’ story about Mr. Gardiner?”

It was her turn to laugh. “Oh, you know! About that man he killed, or didn’t kill, up in the Lakes somewhere. I really think it was your *duty* to have told — anybody mightn’t have cared to stop at his hotel after a thing like that!”

“Who told you anything about it?”

“Louisa, of course. Louisa’s always my newsmonger. She had it from the maid of the man’s wife — Mrs. Tyne, wasn’t her name? No, Trent. I knew it was some river or other. Maids tell each other everything. It only came out yesterday, else I’d have been at you about it before. Louisa swears Mr. Gardiner really did it, and you screened him. Did he? and did you? Do tell! It isn’t every day one comes across a thrilling tale like this!”

“There was an inquest,” said Denis stiffly. “You can read all about it in the papers, if you choose. It was brought in accidental death.”

“Well, I know that, or Mr. Gardiner would have gone to prison, wouldn’t he? But what Louisa says is that the whole truth didn’t come out at the inquest. He knocked the man down, or something, instead of his tumbling of himself. I can quite believe he would knock a man down, if he lost his temper. Did he really do it, and make you hush it up? I do so want to know!”

“My dear,” said Miss Byrd gently, “don’t you see you’re worrying Mr. Merion-Smith!”

“Am I?” said Dorothea. She shot a cool, leisurely, searching glance at Denis’s troubled face. “Well, I’m sure

I don't see what there is to worry anybody in what I've been saying — unless, of course, it's true!"

Denis had to say something. He felt for and found his voice, hoping it sounded more natural to her than it did to himself. "It was — rather a bad business," he got out. "I — don't much care for talkin' about it. I don't think Miss O'Connor quite realizes what it meant for us — we saw it, you know; and Mrs. Trent too —" He stuck fast. Was that the best he could do for his friend? The old excuse rose to his lips. "But I can assure you it was an accident!"

"Oh, well, of course I'm sorry if I said what I oughtn't. I only meant it for a joke!" said Dorothea conventionally.

Denis turned away to the window. What evil fiend had prompted her to dig up that story? It was none the sweeter for its long burial. On Dorothea's lips it made him feel sick. He had a passing pain and wonder at her tone, so discordant, so unlike herself. But that was due to shyness, he told himself, the struggles of a wild thing to escape capture, and putting the thought by he went on steadily to his purpose. It was not easy to turn Denis when his mind was made up. He spoke the sentence he had prepared before entering the house.

"Have you seen your back tire?"

"My tire? No! Is it down?"

Out she ran — as he had guessed she would; but it was at any cost to get away from him, not for the car's sake — and that he did not guess. He followed her. Dorothea, pretending to examine her tires, looked up and knew herself caught.

"Why, they're all right," she said, rising from the last of the wheels. "Did you think I had a puncture?"

"No, and I never said I did. I wanted to speak to you," said Denis coolly.

She faced him across the car, as cool as he. "Better not."

"I want to ask you something. I want to know if you will do me the very great honor of becoming my wife."

How quietly he said it, looking at her with his steady eyes! Dorothea shook her head. "Never."

"Ah, but I'm not askin' for an answer at once."

"Never. Never. Never," she repeated with rising emphasis. "I *never* will — and you wouldn't ask it if you knew!"

"You're not engaged already?"

"Oh, no!" she cried, with a laugh that set his teeth on edge. She turned towards the door. Denis instinctively put out a hand to detain her. She flashed round, quick and dangerous as a cat.

"Don't touch me, don't stop me — you'll be sorry for it if you do!"

Denis was in far too great pain and confusion to obey, or even to take in what she said. "You weren't like this yesterday!" he said, pleading.

"I always was. Always. I had my reasons for pretending to tolerate you for a time, but I always felt the same."

"You said you loved me!"

"It wasn't true, it wasn't true. I hate you."

"But why? What have I done?"

"Told lies, and screened a murderer."

"*What?*"

"It's your own fault, you would have it," said Dorothea, trembling with passion. "I *told* you not to stop me, and you would. Saying it was an accident — that old story! I was sure enough before, I know for certain now."

Denis's hand went up to his head. "What are you talking about?"

"About Major Trent, whom Mr. Gardiner killed. He did kill him. He knocked him down with a chisel, and he died. Didn't he? *Didn't he?* You know you can't deny it!"

He could not, nor could he meet her eyes, so he missed their expression. Certain things are so cruelly hard that they must be carried through at a rush, or not at all. Dorothea's vengeance had turned into a two-edged sword in her hands, and she hewed with it recklessly because it was cutting her to the bone.

"Why, it's not a year yet since he died, and do you think I'd *let* myself love a man who — who almost helped to kill him?" she cried with anguish. "Oh, I hate, hate, *hate* you, and I always will. Oh, Guy, Guy, do they think I'd forget so soon, and be friends with your murderers? I'd kill myself sooner!"

Sobbing vehemently, she fled into the house.

When Denis got home, he found a belated letter from Lettice, which should have been delivered that morning, but had been carried on by mistake to the next farm. It had come, said Miss Simpson, just after he started; the boy must actually have passed him in the drive.

CHAPTER XV

WANTED

We took no tearful leaving,
'Twas time and time to go;
Behind lay dock and Dartmoor,
Ahead lay Callao!

The Broken Men.

THE hamlet of Woodlands is near Wrotham, in the county of Kent. To reach it you must take the old Chatham and Dover at Victoria and get out at Otford, a sweet-scented village sitting at ease in the wide vale of the Darenth. Leaving that behind, you will turn eastwards by the Pilgrims' Way, which winds along the lower spurs of the Downs, above Kemsing, Ightham, St. Clere, on its way to Canterbury. That too you leave in half-a-mile, and strike into the hills on your left, up a perpendicular lane where the contour lines on the ordnance map jostle each other, four, five, six, seven hundred feet in the width of as many yards, the woods climbing with you, arching your road in a green tunnel. They thin, they dispart, and you are on the summit of the Downs; great rolling fluted hills covered with thymy turf, knots of gorse, noble trees standing singly with a scattering of bracken in their shade, innumerable rabbits tossing up their little white scuts as they bolt into their burrows. Very steep and graceful in their lines, these Kentish hills; very beautiful the green floor of the valley outspread below, the wooded height of River Hill, the hare-bell blue of distant chains, rising half transparent against the sky.

On you go, turning your back on all this, over the ridge, into the heart of the Downs. Your lane twists, dropping into nameless green dells, rising over nameless green knolls, between woods that slope a dozen ways at once, and hedge-

rows which "the primroses run down to, carrying gold"—even in October. Next you pass a farm, with its warm-scented yellow ricks, its black barns, mossy-thatched, its garden full of milk-white phlox, magenta chrysanthemums, black and yellow sun-flowers, tan and purple snapdragons. You wheel round a corner, you descend another break-neck lane all grass and flints, and here in a green nest among the hills, which rise steep all round, here you will find your journey's end—the hamlet of Woodlands. Half-a-dozen old cottages, a minute school-house, a minute church, and the vicarage.

Gardiner's birthplace was a square white house with a red roof, green jalousies, and bay windows on either side of a pillared porch. In front, a square of lawn was guarded from the road by a laurel hedge, and bisected by a gravel walk leading to the door. Picture the place in October. Those white walls are hidden, partly by Gloire de Dijon roses, still thick with yellow buds and creamy blossoms, for it is warm in this nest among the hills; and partly by creepers, cardinal, carmine, red-rose, fringing out in trails of daffodil green. The borders are full of flowers, roses and chrysanthemums blooming together, yellow and brown nasturtiums among their thin round emerald leaves, Michaelmas daisies, a bank of lilac against the laurels. The woods are full-leaved still and autumn-glorious; there is russet of oaks, orange of hawthorns, lemon-yellow of maples, and here and there, like black-cowled monks at a pageant, the scattered yews which always haunt the line of the Pilgrims' Way. Woods, woods, and woods all round, rising like a golden cup, save only to the north. Here a valley opens, and the unfenced, unmetalled road winds away, between hills of thin grayish-green turf, white-scarred with chalk and dotted with sheep, towards Maplescombe, Farningham, and civilization, represented by the unpleasant town of Dartford.

Two young men were pacing the vicarage lawn. One was slight, short, dark, un-English: Harry Gardiner. The other was tall, broad-shouldered, serious, ultra-correct: his brother

Tom, of the Royal Engineers. Tom, though three years the younger, was in the case of the elder brother of the parable, who really had his grievance. He had always been an exemplary son, steady, dutiful, even clever; yet Mr. Gardiner freely proclaimed his preference for the vagabond and run-away. Moreover, though he had worked hard all his life, Tom made barely enough by his profession to keep himself. Harry, the rolling stone, had but to open his hand for the gifts of Fortune to tumble into it, and was able to make his father a comfortable allowance. He was lucky; Tom was not. Tom felt sometimes a little sore; but he acknowledged ruefully that it was nobody's fault, and couldn't be helped. There was a child-like vigor and directness about Mr. Gardiner's feelings which made them wholly insuppressible, and though he was often egregiously unfair, neither of his sons dreamed of resenting it.

"Well, I'm glad you wired for me, false alarm or no. I'd ten times rather you sometimes brought me over when it's not necessary than think you mightn't do it when it was. A wonderful old boy, he really is—but I wish he wouldn't play the divvle with his constitution quite so freely!"

This was Harry, light, quick, decisive. Tom's voice was slower and deeper.

"He let out to-day that the attack came on after he'd been rolling the lawn all the morning."

"No, did he? What a cunning old sinner it is! I must say it's a comfort to me to know that you're so close at hand at Chatham, Tom. By the way, when do you expect to get your step?"

"Not for a couple of years yet," said Tom, with a sigh. "Promotion in the Sappers is so beastly slow!"

Gardiner shot a keen glance at him.

"And you won't marry till you do get it?"

"Can't afford to, unless I'm sent to India," Tom ruefully acknowledged.

"Borrow off me, and settle things up at once."

"Many thanks, but I should never be able to pay you back."

"Don't, then. I'm laying up treasure on earth, which the Prayer Book says I mustn't. There's a couple of hundred lying idle at my bank which you're entirely welcome to, and which would just tide you over the next two years. You ought to be a family man, Thomas, you were cut out for it. Besides, Miss Woodward will get sick of waiting."

Tom continued to shake his obstinate head. "It's very good of you, but I'd rather not do that," he said with some constraint. "You'll want to marry yourself some day."

Gardiner looked at him again, with a faint, faint light of amusement. He could never bring himself to take Tom quite seriously. How annoying that was, to Tom! and how little Gardiner meant to annoy!

"When I find myself in danger of matrimony, maybe I'll start saving," he said lightly. "I suppose it's no use pressing you? No? Well, of course I'd take it myself, if I were in your shoes, but then I haven't your fine sturdy independence, Thomas — also I'm older than you are, and a little less positive about the lines of right and wrong. There are times when you remind me of Denis Merion-Smith, do you know? By the by, I must run down and see him before I go back. Yes, and if I pass through town I can also see —"

His voice trailed off into a meditative whistle, and a spark lighted in his eye.

"Who?" asked Tom with curiosity.

"A young lady friend of mine, who's invited me to call on her. There's a plum for you, Thomas; make the most of it. Hullo, here's daddy."

Mr. Gardiner appeared in the porch, a small wiry figure with a spud in his hand and a Scotch plaid trailing from one shoulder. The top of his head was bald as ivory, but he carefully trained across it certain gray locks which, when he went out without a hat (as he did more often than not), ruffled up on end like a crest. He was making towards the flower-bed when his son came and took the tool away.

"No, daddy, that I really can't allow," he declared, folding the plaid round the little figure. It was rather like trying to wrap up a flea, for Mr. Gardiner made a dive in the

middle to uproot a daisy. "You must remember you're an invalid. You sit on the seat and superintend. Vamos, hombre — that's better. Now, what do you want done?"

"The whole place is in a disgraceful state," said the invalid rebelliously. "Disgraceful. It wants digging over from end to end. Look at the lawn! That's a dandelion, I declare!"

He made another dart, again frustrated by his laughing son. "Here, you come and sit on him, Tom, while I mow the lawn!" Tom rather reluctantly sat down and kept his father anchored by the arm, while Gardiner plied the spud with more energy than skill, earning nothing but abuse from the ungrateful invalid.

"You young folk think you can do everything!" he said irately. "I know you! You'll be getting up into my pulpit next. I'll preach next Sunday, no matter what you say, on the dangers of conceit. Nice incapable pair of sons I have!"

The sun shone, the doves purred in the lime-trees, and Mr. Gardiner scolded his sons with all his energetic soul because they wouldn't let him dig over the asparagus beds. He had prolonged his life to this his sixty-ninth year on cod-liver oil, and was now recovering from an attack of hemorrhage. He had had three in the past four years, but he could never be persuaded to take any precautions. He kept his sons in perpetual anxiety, tempered, at least for Gardiner, by faith in his luck. He had deserved to die a dozen times, but he never had; and Gardiner found it hard to believe he ever would.

You cannot know a man thoroughly till you have seen him in his home. He may be more truly himself away from it; but his relations with his family always contribute something to the sum of his character. Woodlands was Harry Gardiner's home; those woods had been the background and the vicarage the foreground of his childhood. The income of the living was one hundred and seventy pounds, and Mrs. Gardiner had besides sixty pounds a year of her own. After deducting life assurance, expense of collection and

rates (which the unhappy parson whose stipend comes from tithe pays on the whole of his income, as well as on the ratable value of his house), there was left about one hundred and forty pounds to live on. That, for four persons, is poverty: not want, but wholesome, bracing poverty. Many a time had Gardiner blessed his early training to endure hardness. He blessed also the memory of his big, breezy, soft-hearted, hot-tempered, quick-witted mother. Two pictures rose in his mind whenever Gardiner thought of her. In one she was chopping suet with *La Hermana San Sulpicio* propped on the kitchen scales before her nose; in the other she was boxing the ears of a choir-boy who sang flat. She was half Spanish, and had been brought up as a Roman Catholic; but she 'verted so completely that she was able to remain a High Churchwoman, and to enjoy hearing Mass from time to time. She died during Harry's first voyage, of measles, caught in Sunday school.

Gardiner lounged on the seat, his labors ended, with an affectionate arm thrown round his father's shoulders. Presently the postman came in sight, and Tom went to take the letters, which were delivered at Woodlands only once a day. There was a moneylender's circular for the vicar, a love letter for himself and a whole sheaf for Harry, sent on from Rochehaut, which he had left at a moment's notice, in answer to Tom's telegram. Tom, absorbed in his charming May, Mr. Gardiner, inveighing against the slackness of the Government, failed to notice, either of them, the startling change in Harry's face as he examined his share of the post.

"Daddy, I'm sorry to say I've got to go."

He was already on his feet, crushing the letter in his hand. Mr. Gardiner looked up.

"Go? You can't go, it's just dinner-time. I never knew anybody so restless as you two boys; you can't be still a moment!" This was indeed Satan rebuking sin. "Where do you want to go to?"

"Can't say. Callao, for choice."

"What?"

"Callao?" echoed Tom, at the same moment. "Why, I thought you were due back at Rochehaut on Saturday!"

"So I am, but I shall have to cut it. Look here, daddy, I'm really most frightfully sorry." He dropped down again beside his father and threw an arm round his neck. "You mustn't worry your dear old head about it, because it's not worth that; but the truth is I've got myself into rather a scrape. I'm wanted by the police, if you please! Silly business, isn't it? Of course it'll all blow over, but in the meantime I have to clear out. I don't want to be had up. There's a train to town at two-thirty, which I shall just catch if I put a sprint on. What, Tom? Oh, it's Merion-Smith who writes me. His letter's been out to Rochehaut, and they kept it there till they heard from me telling them to forward things. That's why I'm in such a divvle of a hurry."

"But, Harry, Harry," cried the old man, clinging to him with the tenacity of age and love, "what is it about? And is it true? Have you done anything? Are you to blame?"

"No, daddy, I'm not." The answer came unhesitatingly. He stooped and kissed his father. "Don't you worry about that. I've done nothing to be ashamed of, I give you my word. I'll write and tell you all about it, and the reason why I can't stay, but I haven't time now. See after him, Tom!"

The son who wasn't wanted tried vainly to console the old man for the loss of the son who was. Mr. Gardiner would have pursued Harry to his room with questions if the nurse had not come out to take him in charge; failing that, he sent Tom to knock at the door. A preoccupied voice told him to come in, and there was Gardiner on his knees, cramming clothes into a suit-case — a contrast, this, to his usual methodical habits.

"I've written a check payable to you for the amount of my balance at the bank," he said without looking up; "it's there on the table. Better cash it at once, and then you can

let father have his money as usual. I may want some myself later on, when I can let you have an address. By the way, have you any ready money on you?"

"Only loose silver."

"Oh, dash! — I'm run short too, and I know daddy hasn't any in the house. Well, I must raise the wind in town somehow. It's an infernal nuisance about the delay of that letter. Nearly ten days since Denis wrote!"

"But look here," said Tom, getting out the question that was burning his tongue, "what's it all about? What are you accused of?"

"Murder; so now you know."

"Good God!"

Gardiner only laughed, and went on with his packing. Tom, after a moment's appalled silence, found words.

"Then in heaven's name, Harry, if you're innocent, why do you bolt? You're giving your case away. You'll never be able to show your face in England again — why, good heavens! it means that father will never see you again! It'll break his heart. Why on earth don't you stay and face it out?"

"Because I did it, my good chap." Gardiner faced his brother for the first time, sitting back on his heels. "Mind you, what I said to father was strictly true. I've done nothing to be ashamed of; nothing I wouldn't do again tomorrow — or you either, you pillar of respectability! If I were at liberty to explain all the circumstances I certainly wouldn't bolt. But I'm not; and there's the rub. Why? — oh, it's a complicated business; there are other people involved. That's why I'm departing in such a hurry. Cheer up, Thomas; it's less scandalous to have a brother in Callao than one dangling at the end of a string in Westby Jail. Better for father too. I can at least write to him."

Tom did not answer. Homicide is homicide, no matter what specious excuses Harry might manufacture; and after hearing his gloss on his downright denial to his father, Tom was not disposed to trust his assertions of innocence.

The room was in the front of the house, giving on the

garden and the road. Tom's eyes became riveted to some object outside.

"There's the Wrotham bobby at the gate, with another man."

"What?"

Gardiner sprang to the window, and then fell back out of sight behind the curtain. "Yes; they're after me. Wired out to Rochehaut, I suppose, and wired back. Keep them off daddy, and stick out to him that I'm innocent. Keep them off me too, if you can, and give me a start. Say I've gone to town. I'll write when I can."

Tom clattered down the stairs behind his lighter-footed brother. At the bottom the passage ran right and left, to front and back. Gardiner turned to the left, but was stopped by a grip on his shoulder. The ties of brotherhood held in the face of danger. Tom was holding out his hand.

"Good-by, Harry — God bless you."

"Good-by, old Tom."

They parted: Tom to the front, to tackle the police; Gardiner to the back, *en route* for South America.

CHAPTER XVI

COUNSEL OF PERFECTION

Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise.

The Ring and the Book.

GARDINER was just one second too late. As he reached the back door the police arrived at the front; and they saw him. The Wrotham man, who had known him as a wicked small boy, raised a sort of view-hallo and dashed into the hall in pursuit. But Tom's broad figure was in the way (not obstructing the police, oh dear, no, nothing further from his mind, just solidly, immovably stupid!); and while Cotterill dodged round him, Gardiner had time to slip through the back door, slam it and turn the key in his pursuer's face.

He was not one of those unready mortals who are flustered by a sudden strain. On the contrary, it braced him. He dragged Tom's bicycle out of the shed, and ran it up the kitchen garden to the gate which led into the glebe; then across the meadow, the mild cows shying and backing with lowered heads as he rushed by to a second gate, giving on the road. Nobody in sight yet, the coast still clear. He heaved his machine over the bars, vaulted them himself and rode for his life.

Woodlands stands at the end of a trident of lanes, whose left arm points towards Otford, its right towards Kingsdown, while the shank leads northwards through Farningham to Dartford. Any one would naturally conclude that a fugitive would choose this last road, which for its first four miles is utterly lonely. Gardiner turned to the right, by the lane which climbs through woods, with many a twist, to join the London road at Kingsdown. How he pedalled up

that hill! But after all, as he told himself, breathless, the gradients were the same for them as for him; and if he was hampered by a strange bicycle, Cotterill was portly.

Level ground at last, and the Portobello inn at the cross-roads where the lane cuts the highway. Here the fugitive fell in with the great stream of motorists and cyclists who frequent this road for the pleasure of spinning down Wrotham Hill in one direction, Farningham Hill in the other. On the Dartford road he would have been conspicuous to every one he met; here he was a unit in the crowd. He turned towards London. Down into Farningham, over the bridge, with its magnificent horse chestnut leaning to the Darenth, a tower of gold on a field of emerald; up the opposite slope to Swanley Junction; on through the Crays to Sidcup, where the suburbs begin, shades of the prison-house; and finally, London itself.

On Vauxhall Bridge he halted, to consider his course. It was unlucky, most unlucky that Cotterill had seen him; his description would be all over the country to-morrow. The first thing was to get money. He must borrow; but from whom? Denis was at Bredon, his other male friends were in the ends of the earth. Yet he knew without hesitation where to go. It occurred to him to wonder, as he asked his way of the policeman outside Vauxhall station, what Tom would have said to the idea of borrowing from a girl.

Strange how much of an alien he felt here in London! His imagination, roving always among woods and mountains, a green thought in a green shade, fell choked among bricks and mortar; his sense of smell, keen like that of a wild creature, was offended by the fumes of motor buses, by hot whiffs from restaurants and cook-shops, by the odor of the horses and of asphalt in the sun. Above all, he hated the crowds. City-lovers, city-dwellers all of them, the seedy loafer spitting into the Thames, and the girl in magenta and *blanc de perle*, who threw him coquettish glances from under her lace veil. "I can do with these people for a few hours, or even for a day or two, but to live here!" he thought. And then came the inevitable corollary: "If I feel like this

now, what would it be to be boxed up with twelve or fifteen hundred of them, day and night, for years?" He turned his back on that thought. He had to keep a steady hand to ward off panic, which lurked at his heels like a wolf.

He carried himself and his alien feelings across town, and presently arrived at 22 Canning Street. Miss Smith was out. That he had expected, and he came in to wait. The little maid preceded him up seventy-five steps to Lettice's attic. "Oh, them stairs!" she sighed, with a hand at her waist. Gardiner wondered how Lettice liked the climb. She was not so very fond of hills. But when he was left alone, and had looked out of her window far across the roofs, and seen her glimpse of the river and of the Surrey hills, he understood. It was worth it. Here, above the world, Lettice found the breathing-space which she loved as well as he. There was a pot of violets on the table; he put the blossoms aside with one finger, and buried his nose in the moss surrounding them. That was good! That was the breath of the woods; Gardiner would have given all the flower scents in the world for that wet woody fragrance.

Sitting down, he discovered that he was tired, very tired. It is deadly demoralizing to be hunted. Here for the moment he was safe; and in the blessed relief from strain he fell asleep.

Lettice came in from the Museum at six; she had her own key, and as it chanced did not meet the little maid Beatrice. Up the stairs she toiled, with her neat case of papers, came into her room, meticulously noiseless as her pleasure was, and paused by her table, pulling off her gloves, ever so slowly, before she found energy to look round. Then she saw Gardiner asleep in her chair.

It was one of Lettice's principles never to interfere with anybody if she could possibly help it. She saw no reason for waking him; she did not wake him. She set about making tea instead. A spirit stove burns noiseless; crockery deftly handled need not chink. The soft sounds of Lettice's business would not have startled a mouse. She cut bread and butter. She carried a bunch of water-cress to

the tap on the landing and washed it there. She fetched from her cupboard a shape of tongue, a glass of shrimp paste, fresh butter, strawberry jam, bananas — the usual menu of the dweller in rooms. It was not in the bond that she should lay her own meals, but she often did it to save Beatrice's tired legs. Lastly, she made the tea. As she replaced the kettle on the stove, the lid fell off; and Gardiner awoke.

He sat up and stared.

"Tea's ready," Lettice announced, with a benignant smile.

"I never heard you come in!"

"I know," said his hostess, "you were *fast* asleep. Come along, before the toast gets cold."

She asked no questions, she seemed to want no explanations. Blessed are the people who take things for granted! Gardiner drew up his chair, discovering suddenly that he was hungry. Lettice poured out: soft-toned, placid, soothing Lettice, supplying the needs of his body with maternal care, and sitting there opposite, delicately fresh and neat, with those misleadingly soft, derisive hazel eyes! He liked to watch the slow, accurate movements of her hands, and their funny little flutter of make-believe agitation, when she hastened to supply his request for a piece of sugar.

"I don't believe you've had any lunch," she admonished him, pouring out his third cup.

"Haven't. I came off in a hurry. I don't know that I ever tasted anything quite so good as this tongue of yours. You are a Good Samaritan, you know."

Lettice did not tell him he was eating up her Sunday dinner. She dismissed the subject with her little French shrug.

"And how's Mr. Gardiner?"

"Going strong. I say, would you very much mind if I had a pipe?" Lettice, who loathed tobacco, shook her head. "Sure? You really have all the virtues. By the way, can you lend me some money?"

If that did not startle her, nothing would! It did not startle her. She looked pensive for a moment, then asked: "How much do you want?"

"How much have you?"

"Nine sovereigns, and the change out of another."

"Could you possibly let me have the nine sovereigns?"

Lettice nodded. Getting up without more ado, she unlocked her desk, strung out the sovereigns in a row upon the white cloth beside him, and returned to her seat.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Gardiner. "Don't you even want to know what I want it for?"

She shook her head as usual, then added a polite but perfunctory "Yes, of course I'm very much interested."

"I want it because the police are after me."

At that she looked up.

"Yes, the old affair at Grasmere. You weren't in time with that letter to Denis. Mrs. Trent's been at Dent-de-lion for the last six weeks — ever since she left Rochehaut; and she's managed to worm the truth out of Denis. What? Oh yes, the truth; I forgot you didn't know. I did knock Trent down. Of course he was simply asking for it; but the fact remains that technically I'm guilty of manslaughter — murder, Mrs. Trent calls it. Does that give you the horrors?"

"No," said Lettice.

Gardiner's eye lit up. "Ah! it did to Tom. It does to Denis, though he'd rather die than own it. But I had a sort of feeling that you wouldn't take it like that. . . . You know, it gave me the deuce of a twinge when Tom turned chilly!"

Lettice nodded, accepting that unlikely confidence as a matter of course. She reverted to his former speech.

"Did you say she got it out of Denis?"

"She did. How, I don't know. He doesn't say: doesn't say much, in fact. But she knows that if he's put into the witness-box he can't deny it. You know, she played — well, you might fairly call it a shabby trick on me; and I never blamed her. I'm fair game. But Denis is quite another pair of shoes. I don't know how I'm going to forgive her for meddling with him. You see his letter."

Lettice read the few stiff phrases in which Denis owned

that he had let his friend's secret escape. He said little about Dorothea, not a word about himself.

"I call that one of the most pathetic things I've ever read," said Gardiner, with far more feeling than he had shown for his own misfortune. "I'd have owned up voluntarily, I swear I would, sooner than have this happen. It doesn't do to play tricks of this sort on a fellow like Denis. They cut too deep. It's like ill-treating a child. Oh, it was a beastly thing to do!"

"It was a damnable thing to do."

Strong words, to suit strong feelings. Lettice's soft lips were grim. Gardiner was disposed to feel sorry for Dorothea. But there was nothing to be done, nothing; Lettice laid by her wrath in silence and brought back her mind to Gardiner's case.

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I? Oh, I'm off. Didn't I tell you the police are after me?"

"The police?"

"Chasing me out of Woodlands on bikes. You see this letter of Denis's, which was evidently written post-haste after Mrs. Trent got the truth out of him, is dated Tuesday, the eighth; which was the very day I got Tom's wire calling me home. It must have gone out to Rochehaut and lain there nearly a week, till I wrote for my mail to be forwarded. In the meantime I presume Mrs. Trent took her tale to the police. She can be quite temperate and convincing when she likes; besides, she has an uncle in the Home Office, Sir Thomas Felton, who's no end of a swell — I heard that quite by accident the other day — and he no doubt pulled some wires. The magistrates would grant a warrant; then I imagine a detective started for Rochehaut, found me gone, got my address in England and came straight back. At any rate, this morning, not ten minutes after I'd got Denis's bomb-shell, a couple of bobbies turned up at the vicarage to arrest me. I evaded out of the back door as they came in at the front, and got away on Tom's bike. They don't know I'm riding, so I hope they'll waste time looking

for a pedestrian. I'll stay here till it's dark if you'll put up with me, bike on to Southampton to-night and work my way out to South America. I'm no amateur, you see — I've done it before."

Lettice's face did not usually express her feelings, but as Gardiner proceeded with his tale, it woke up. She said:

"Then do you mean to say you're running away?"

"*Claro*. What else would you have me do?"

"You might stay and face it."

He shook his head. "Not good enough. I did knock him down, and he did die. I should pretty certainly be convicted of manslaughter, and might get quite a stiff sentence."

"Not if you explained the provocation."

"I think so, even then." Gardiner could not tell her, as he had told Tom, that on the vital point his tongue was sealed. She knew too much. He temporized. "You see, it was the wrong sort of provocation. All I could say would be that he was telling stories that weren't very pretty, and you'd never get a British jury to sympathize with a fancy scruple of that sort. Besides, I've damaged my own case by not owning up at once. That would tell against me very heavily — very heavily indeed. No, I'm afraid there's nothing for it but to clear out."

Lettice said nothing, but her face continued to express complete and solid disagreement. She rose to clear the table. Gardiner, who had his chair tilted back and his fork balancing on one finger, after one glance at her, proceeded to develop his argument.

"It would, as I say, mean prison; and prison is precisely the one thing I'm not prepared to stand. It's not the hardships — they're luxury compared to what I've put up with in my time — it's the confinement, the restraint, the — the utter beastliness of never being able to get away from somebody's eyes! I assure you it gives me the blue divvles even to think of. I am convinced it would drive me off my head. I should go *must*, and brain a warder — no, I think it would be the doctor for choice: I met him once, he was a sympa-

thetic little brute as ever stepped. I'd far rather be hanged out of hand."

Lettice, still mute, took away his fork. Gardiner perseveringly glanced up into her small pale face for a change of opinion. The more she disapproved, the more he wanted to win her over to his own way of thinking. He was growing quite absurdly anxious to propitiate this exacting critic.

"Don't you think, in view of all the circumstances — the feelings of my family, the unpleasant scandal, and my own state of blue funk — don't you think the best thing I can do is to clear out?"

Lettice had to speak now, and she spoke.

"If you're afraid of a thing, I should think you'd want to face it and prove to yourself that you aren't."

"Prove to myself that I'm not afraid of prison? But I am!"

"Then that's all the more reason for not running away."

Uncompromising! Lettice, who could bend her supple mind to look through the eyes of tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor or any one else even down to the thief, and could sympathize with all, could not sympathize with Gardiner: could not believe, or even pretend to believe, that cowardice might ever be more expedient for him than courage. It was not so much the immorality of running away, it was the stupidity of it: the fact that he was destroying his own future happiness, making it impossible for himself ever again to live at peace with his own soul. All very well for weaklings to be weak; but Gardiner — she couldn't understand how he could think twice about it! Her dissent was so acute that it made itself felt through all her reticences and evasions. Gardiner stared, his own eyes opening to see his future as she saw it; but he shut them again at once, and willfully turned away.

"Oh, that's idealism," he said, with a short laugh, "and this is a world of compromise. I can't get so high as you. If I'm afraid of a thing, I want quite simply to run away. Talking of which, I'd better be off; it's dark enough now."

He went to the window, and came back. Lettice was sweeping up the crumbs; she moved the nine sovereigns out of her way. Gardiner picked them up and let them slip one by one into his pocket.

"You aren't going to reclaim your loan, then, and force me to face my bogy?"

She shook her head, twice, slowly. Gardiner had singed himself once already at the fire, yet he returned again, fluttering round the dangerous subject. He would have given anything to drag some sort of approval, or even condonation, out of Lettice. It seemed to him that she must be persuaded, if he could only put his case convincingly enough.

"Of course it's just on the cards that I might be hanged for murder, you know," he pointed out — not believing it, but for the sake of argument. "Come now; won't you at least admit for my father's sake it's better not to take that risk?"

Lettice lifted herself, straightening her shoulders. Tray in hand, brush in the other, a domesticated sibyl, she faced him and delivered her final judgment.

"I should think Mr. Gardiner would rather have you *hanged* than running away!"

CHAPTER XVII

A GREEN THOUGHT IN A GREEN SHADE

Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare!
The Woods of Westermain.

GARDINER bought himself an outfit at a second-hand dealer's in one of the back streets off the Vauxhall Bridge Road. His plan was to ride as far as the next station before Southampton, leave his machine at the cloak-room there, and change his clothes in some wood before going on into the town. Once among the docks, he would slip on board some outward-bound ship, if he could find one about to sail and if he could evade the night watchman, and stow away till she was at sea. Such things are still done by gentlemen whose reasons for not signing on in public are urgent. Of course the captain might hand him over to the British consul at the end of the voyage — but he preferred not to think of that.

From the Portobello inn to London is exactly twenty-one miles, from London to Southampton is something under eighty: a longish journey for an out-of-practice rider on a strange machine. Gardiner left town by the Portsmouth road. The first green he passed (by such things did he count off the stages of his journey, where another man would have reckoned by inns), was Clapham Common, a dismal vision of lamps, railings, wet asphalt, unhappy grass, and avenues of suicidal trees. Next came Wandsworth Common; then, beyond Roehampton, Wimbledon and Richmond Park. They gave him a breath of true night sweetness, but he was in Surbiton directly, with its blazing lamps and self-complacent villas. Gardiner hated suburbs. Better the frank vulgar life of the Vauxhall Bridge Road than their soul-destroying, smug respectability. He raced on

through Esher, sedate and pleasant old town; and with the end of Esher came the beginning of the real country.

"My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll,
Freshening and fluttering in the wind. . . ."

Beyond the palings of Claremont Park, at the entrance of the Oxshott woods, he was brought up by a puncture. He mended it, crouching under a lamp beside the road. Unfenced, alluring, dangerous, the woods pressed up behind. They sent forward their scouts, silver birches up to their knees in bracken which crept out to the very edge of the road, black pines stalking forward, stealthy as red-skins, to peer down at the stranger. Scents and sounds of the forest floated out, filaments of enticement. Gardiner glanced irresolutely down the road, while under the solemn-burning, stately procession of lamps, which marched away through the night over valley and hill. A car rushed by, steaming golden vapors: it glared at him for an instant with big golden eyes, and was gone, with dying roar. He looked down the road of mankind; and then over his shoulder at the silent tempting ranks of the pines and the soft savage darkness that pressed close on every side. If he rested here for ten minutes or so? He was tired; and there was no hurry. He dragged his bicycle out of the ditch and wheeled it into the woods.

Moss underfoot; on either side the pines, scattered at first among fine-leaved undergrowth, then closing up in ordered ranks. His lamp tiger-striped their dark even columns till he left the machine propped against one of them. Even by day the heart of these woods is lonely. The trippers who sit by companies along every green ride, with their buns and oranges, never wander far from the path. Presumably they are afraid of bears. Now, by night, the whole forest was triumphantly savage, solitary, and dark, so dark that Gardiner, though he had cat's eyes, sometimes greeted his friends the trees by running into them. He soon strayed from the track, Underfoot the ground became swampy.

Pools of red-brown rain-water splashed him to the knee; long brambles trailed their thorns across his face.

The ground rose beneath his feet, and he found himself stumbling up a hill, his feet sinking deep in soft masses of pine-needles. Here was the summit of a ridge, so steep and narrow that on either side he could see the pallor of the sky between the dark columns of the trees. As he followed the line of the ridge downwards the woods closed again, but there grew before him, low among the stems, a sort of pool of whiteness: not the sky this time, but the light of some clearing. The ridge came to its end in an abrupt round knoll, the ground fell away at his feet, and there — O miracle of sudden loveliness! — before him shone a lake. Ebony and silver, polished like a mirror, misted with faint gauze, it lay in a cup of soft black woods. A rustling throng of rushes, pale and ghostly, stepped forward into the water among their slim reflections. Silver-gray and even-tinted, the sky arched above, cut by the small incisive crescent of the moon.

Gardiner threw himself down among the pine-needles. He gave himself to the woods, and let them work on him with their melancholy and voluptuous charm. The night took his spirit in her cool hands and smoothed it out, as the sun smoothes and strengthens the crumpled wings of a new-hatched butterfly. It was not enough that he should steep himself in loveliness; a thousand light touches were stilling and charming every nerve of sensation, smell and touch and hearing as well as sight. There was the surging murmur of the wind among the pines; night perfumes of water and forest; warm elastic softness of the fir-needles under his tired body. The old pagan earth was whispering her seductions into his ear.

"Love and joy be thine, O spirit, for ever;
Serve thy sweet desire; despise endeavor."

"If you're afraid of a thing, I should think you'd want to face it and prove to yourself that you aren't."

The words floated into his head out of nowhere. He

could hear the very intonation of Lettice's voice. "What folly!" he said to himself, and laughed the memory away. Nevertheless, a sharp little dart of discomfort stuck fast in his self-complacency, and, smarting, forced him to think. How much better it was to lie here free in the woods than in a police court cell! to listen to the wind in the pines rather than to a casual "drunk and dis" banging on his door! Yes, said a voice, rising unexpectedly within him to take sides with Lettice, but does one live only for what is comfortable? "*That's all the more reason for staying.*" There was Lettice's answer, net and uncompromising. She would not have run away. Denis, then: how would he have taken it? Denis, more single-minded, would not even have felt the temptation—it would never have occurred to him that to run away was possible. No, the fact was not to be blinked; what he was doing would surprise and disappoint both these friends of his. Be it so, then, he told himself, defiant; he would still do it, even in the face of these disapproving witnesses.

In the face of another Witness, moreover. Men who live close to nature cannot escape from the presence of God. Only for a very few years of his very early youth had Gardiner been able to be a materialist. As soon as the soul was born in him (about the age of eighteen; for boys haven't souls, only the rudiments) he had begun to be conscious of the august and gracious Power which held him as in the hollow of a hand. The feeling was intermittent, the grip at times relaxed, but it never let him free. Now, to his anger and terror, he felt again the pressure of that control. The Hand that held him forced on him no action; but gently, steadily, inexorably, it turned him to face the truth, bidding him see what he was doing. He struggled against it with passion, trying to avert his eyes, trying to get back to the spirit of the woods, but in vain. And then suddenly his resistance collapsed, and he looked. Yes! he was running away. He was letting his weakness rule. He was destroying the love of his friends, failing them, failing too the Power which had created him to be a fighter, not a

shirker. He blinded his eyes no longer, he did not tell himself that he was taking the only sensible course; he owned that his flight was contemptible. But what else could he do? "I can't go back now!" he said, panic knocking at his heart. "If I'd owned up in the first instance it would have been all right, and I wish to God I had; but now — now I've made it impossible for them to do anything but convict. Oh, what on earth shall I do?"

"Face it," said the inner voice. "Look your fear in the eyes, and look it down. Never mind the cost." And after a pause of struggling terror it spoke again: "If you fail now, it will not be the end; it will be the beginning. You will fail again, and worse. You will go down among the cowards and weaklings. You will lose Denis; you will lose Lettice. Do you know what that means? Look, my child, look well before you do this thing. Weigh what it will cost you."

He weighed it, desperate now under that soft inexorable pressure. He saw, rebelling against the vision, all his future loss. Turning from that, he saw, on the other side, prison, and the tide of panic rushing towards him. Already it was cold about his feet. He could not bear it; he fled for refuge to his old purpose. He must get away. To that thought he clung, lifting his agonized face. "What else can I do? What else can I do?"

And then down came the thunder of the Presence all around him, sweeping him from his poor little foothold. "Do, poor weak human child? *Trust Me*. I will be your strength. Lay your hand in mine and have no fear."

He went down, down, drowned in gulfs of agony, blinded by the light of God. Did he decide for himself, of free will, or was the choice taken out of his hands? It seemed so to him; but in reality it was his own past self which decided, the sum of the courage and the discipline which he had learned in common practice day by day. For God does not save us against our will; and the measure of the triumphant strength which he pours into us in moments of stress is the measure of our own past efforts.

Gardiner lifted his head. The moon was gone now, behind the trees, which threw black shadows across the argent of the lake. He was cold and stiff and desperately tired, but he stood up and began to retrace his steps towards the road. Soon the topaz-gleaming lamps shone through the trees, and he came out not a hundred yards from the point where he had left his bicycle. There was Mars, the star of battles, shining over the glow of London. In the opposite direction lay Southampton and the sea. He turned his back on these, and rode towards that star.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN THE HEART SUFFERS A BLOW

What says the body when they spring
Some monster torture-engine's whole
Strength on it? No more says the soul.

Count Gismond.

FLYING is no sport for the sluggard. The calmest hours of the twenty-four are often those before the dawn, and the earnest aviator must be ready to turn out of his warm bed at six, five, four, even three o'clock in the morning, whether in the pleasant summer, or in the correspondingly unpleasant winter. He may then have to spend long hours at the 'drome waiting for the fog to lift, or the rain to clear, or the wind to drop; and in the end, as like as not, he may have to go home, wet, chilly, and sleepy, without having flown a yard. Decidedly not the sport for a sluggard.

Six A.M. in mid-October, and bitterly cold. There was a gray sky, ripple on ripple of quilted cloud with never a gleam, and a small icy wind that blew persistently from the north. The coarse bice-green of the marshes was all discolored; the sedge, biscuit-pale, was clotted with mud from the September floods; the brimming dikes were ruled by the wind into long ripples, hard and black against the dawn. The dawn itself, how wan and threatening! Denis, surveying the signs of the sky as he unlocked the hangar, exerted himself to remark to Simpson that it looked like rain. Simpson, expert mechanic and latter-day Grimaud, assented with his civil grunt. His uncivil grunt he did not use on Denis, who had once been his officer.

Like every worker who spins his stuff out of his own brain, Denis at times "went stale." For the past ten days the flying boat had been laid aside, and he had been tinkering

at the monoplane by way of relaxation. Never losing sight of the function for which she had been built, that of a small fast scout in the war which he expected, he was always adding small improvements. Thus, after his experience in the Birmingham race, he had fitted her with self-starting gear, which enabled the pilot to get away at will, independent of outside help. Now he was working at a brake. Landing is still one of the chief dangers in cross-country flying, especially in England, where fields are small, and there is often a web of overhead wires. At that time (1913) there were not a dozen aerodromes in the kingdom, and not one aeroplane in ten had a brake of any sort.

Theoretically, Denis's new design was all it should be; practically, of course, it might upset the machine and kill the pilot. Not that Denis ever believed he would be killed. "The airman hath said in his heart, Tush, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen unto me." He believed other people might be killed, however, and for this reason had severely snubbed Simpson when he offered to take on the trials. Simpson, faithful dog, bore no resentment. He had been watching the events of the past few weeks, and had come to the conclusion that 'e (in Simpson's mind Denis was always 'e) wasn't to say accountable just now. "You'd 'a' thought 'e might 'a' took warning by Muster Wandesforde," he reflected. "'E's a nice gent spoiled by the women, if ever there was one. But no. Jane! JANE! 'Ave you got that stooed steak on yet? You ain't? Then it'll be as tough as your shoe again. 'E ain't complained? 'E lef' the lot at the side of 'is plate last time, and if that ain't complainin' I dono what is. Now you get it on at once and let's hear no more chat. Seems to me you ain't good for anything, 'cep that bein' so deaf you can't gossip. Women," added Simpson, knocking out his pipe against his boot, "they're the devil!"

After some preliminary "taxi-ing" on the ground, Denis rose, circling over the marshes. The country was asleep; pillars of smoke rose from cottage chimneys, but not a soul was abroad except the milkman, with his rattling silver cans,

and a solitary cyclist, spinning down the road towards Dent-de-lion. The cyclist waved a greeting; the blasé milkman did not so much as glance up. Denis sailed over them, over the roof of his house, turned into the wind, "flattened out" (*i.e.* brought level the nose of his machine, which had been gliding down a slant) and grounded on the turf without a jar. The brake acted perfectly. Simpson ran up, almost enthusiastic. He and Denis stood together talking shop (which was the sum of Simpson's talk) with zeal (Simpson supplying the zeal).

"Hi!"

Denis turned, screwing up his short-sighted eyes. At sight of the approaching figure his jaw dropped; he spoke one curt imperious sentence over his shoulder to Simpson, seized the new-comer's arm, dragged him back to the house, thrust him into the parlor and locked the door upon him, all without a word. Gardiner was left gasping. Here was a reception! But in a minute Denis was back, pushing open the door with a tray of breakfast crockery and the inevitable sausages. He deposited his burden on the table, which was already laid, and turned to lock the door again.

"What on earth possessed you to come here? I've shut up Simpson, and he'll hold his tongue, but I'd not answer for Miss Simpson, if she saw you. You must be mad!"

"Mad? — to come here? I'm not running from the police, my good Denis; did you think I was?"

"I understood your brother to say —"

"Oh, you've heard from Tom, have you?" Gardiner's tone was a shade less confident. "Yes, I admit I did do a bunk from Woodlands; they took me by surprise, and I wasn't ready for 'em; I had two-three things to finish off — among others, I wanted a word with you. Which is why I'm here. But as soon as I've swallowed the sausage which I trust you're going to offer me I'm off to Margate to surrender to the minions of the law."

"I thought you couldn't stand prison," said Denis. "I thought it was the one risk you weren't prepared to face. However, it's no business of mine. If you can face it, I

certainly think you're wise to. Mustard? Oh, I forgot, you don't take it, do you?"

He poured out a cup of Miss Simpson's rich, muddy coffee for Gardiner and another for himself, but he did not drink; he went to the window and stood looking down the road. Gardiner, who was famished, drew up his chair; but his eyes kept straying to that silent figure. There was something in the wind that he did not like. Denis was utterly unlike himself, unlike any self his friend had ever had a glimpse of. He was so unapproachable that Gardiner knew not how to broach the errand that had brought him there. Presently, however, he turned to attend to Geraldine, who was winding round his boots and opening her little pink mouth in soundless mews of ecstasy. As he rose from putting down the saucer, he caught Gardiner's eye, and smiled faintly.

"Sorry, Harry. 'Fraid I've rather let you down over this business. Anybiddy else would have made a better hand at it. But I'm not much good at dissembling, and tell a lie I can't—any babe could see through it. Else I'd have done my best."

"My dear chap, I don't want you to tell lies for me!" said Gardiner hastily. He was more than surprised; he was appalled. "In point of fact, I'm not sorry it has come out. I've had no peace of my life these last two months, with Mrs. Trent going about like an unexploded bomb. I knew she'd never rest till she harried me into the dock." He perceived, as he spoke, a certain change in the atmosphere. Denis had been sufficiently far away before; now he seemed to recede to the North Pole. There was a snapshot of Dorothea in her flying kit on the mantelpiece. Was *this* the explanation? Surely not! Surely she was the last woman in the world to attract a man like Denis! Gardiner, be it remembered, had never met that eager child who had learned to fly. "It's about her I want to speak to you," he broke the ice determinedly. "Here's the point. Do you, or do you not, remember what Trent said in that last speech of his, just before I let fly at him?"

"I'm hardly likely to forget it."

"No, no, not the sense, the words; the actual phrasing he used. Do you remember that?"

He took a moment to think. "Perhaps not. No, not to swear to."

"Good! Then it's all plain sailing. Tell everything that happened up till then; be as discursive as you please about my share in the business; but say, and swear, and stick to it that you can't remember that last speech, and at any price don't let it be dragged out of you."

"Very well."

"At any price, you understand?"

"At any price?"

"Yes; absolutely without reserve, at any price."

"I understand."

"That's off my mind, then," said Gardiner with a breath of relief. "I had to see you, to make sure we should both be in the same tale. Now I'll be off to Margate while the iron's hot."

"Wait a moment," said Denis, detaining him. "Before you go into this quixotic business I think you ought to see what it means. Of course I know you've been making light of it to spare my feelings, but I don't believe you yourself realize what it is you're up against. It's serious. I'm afraid they're going to make it a perjury charge. I had the police up here for hours yesterday—they wanted to run me in too—"

"You? Oh, my God, Denis! They're not going to do that?"

"No, I don't think so. What's the matter with you?"

"I never dreamed of that," said Gardiner, holding his head in his hands. "I swear I never dreamed there was the remotest possibility of that! To drag you, of all men, into this filthy mess—" He dropped his hands and looked up, speaking fast and free: "Of course you're right. I have been humbugging. I know I'm in for a stiff sentence. I'd ever thought of perjury as a possible charge. But I give you my word, Denis, if I'd ever had the faintest idea there

was the faintest risk of involving you, I'd have — I'd have blown my brains out first. Oh, Lettice was right; it is a fatal thing to be a coward."

"Lettice?"

"I went to her on my way. Yes, I did mean to bolt in the first instance; I've got my rig-out strapped on my bike at this instant. It was she stopped me. She does know how to sting up your conscience! But they can't really drag you in, Denis, can they? You never did actually say one syllable beyond the truth. Did you make them see that?"

"I think so," said Denis. "I don't think they'll take it any further. And if they did, they couldn't convict. It's all right. I don't know what you're putting yourself about for."

"Perjury, Denis? It's not a pretty charge."

"No," said Denis. "Still, I don't know that it much matters."

How quietly he spoke! At Grasmere he had shrunk from the slightest innocent contact with the story; but here was the stain black on his own honor, and it moved him no more than did his friend's remorse. Gardiner had once said it would go hard with Denis if his idols tumbled off their pedestals. This indifference was worse than his worst fears. Would he ever find his way back? Or was there some hidden mischief, some deadly internal injury at which Gardiner could only guess? What had Dorothea done — what had she killed when she struck her blow? There grew on the young man, watching, a sense of disaster. . . .

Denis had drifted back to the window and stood there, absently whistling his one tune:

*"C'est difficile de voir voler Orville;
C'est bien plus dur de voir voler Wilbur —"*

Suddenly he broke off and bent forward in quick attention.

"Anything up?" said Gardiner.

Denis wheeled and swiftly pushed him back from the window.

"The police."

"What, have they come to pump you again?"

"No, it's you they're after."

"Nonsense, man! How can they know I'm here?"

"Evans has told them."

"Who's Evans?"

"The man who brings the milk. He was at the door when you arrived. He's coming up the road with them now."

"But how the deuce should Evans —"

"Your description's out, and a reward. Five hundred pounds. He must have gone straight off to the police station."

"Five hundred pounds!" Gardiner was as white as his shirt. "Who offered it?"

Denis would not answer or look at him. There was no need; Gardiner knew well enough who had offered it, and the shock made him sick. Did she indeed hate him so much as all that?

"Well, they'll save me the trouble of going to Margate," he said as lightly as he could, and moved towards the door. Denis stopped him.

"Wait. Think. If you're taken now, like this, you'll not be allowed bail. You'll be in prison till the February Assizes."

"— Break me in by degrees!" said Gardiner in a sort of gasp, still pressing towards the door. Denis still held him back.

"*Will you cut it?*"

"How can I?"

"Quite simple. The monoplane's out at the back — I told Simpson to have her ready. He'll swear anything I like to tell him, and Miss Simpson never saw you at all. You've only to say the word, and I'll set you down in France within the hour."

"You, Denis? You advise me to run?"

"Why not?" said Denis. "I think the point-of-honor stunt is overdone. It doesn't pay."

Gardiner's ideas of right and wrong were all tumbling about his ears. That Denis should advise such a thing! It

went more than half-way towards making it seem right. It showed, too, that he dreaded the ordeal of the witness-box, and lent a specious color of unselfishness to the plan. And in those last moments of liberty Gardiner, like the prisoner of the Inquisition, seemed to feel the flaming walls sliding together, contracting, closing in upon his life to drive him into the pit. . . . "*If you're afraid of a thing*"— That voice again! There was the touchstone.

"No," said Gardiner. "No, I'm *damned* if I will!"

He walked out and threw open the door to the police.

CHAPTER XIX

DU PARTI DU GRAND AIR

The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.— BOOK OF JOB.

TEN days later, after his examination before the Borough Bench at Westby, Gardiner was committed to the February Assizes on a charge of manslaughter. Bail not being allowed, he spent the intervening months in Westby Jail.

Lettice, in common with the rest of the world who haven't been to prison, knew nothing of the rules and regulations applying to a prisoner on remand. She did know, however, that in English law a man is held to be innocent until he has been found guilty; and she took for granted that any one so detained would be treated in a liberal way, and allowed every possible privilege of the free man except freedom. Accordingly, she wrote to Gardiner at Westby, and, getting no reply, wrote again. This time an answer came through:

MY DEAR MISS SMITH,— Your letters to me and mine to you are all read by the governor of this home of joy. In the circumstances I would rather do without. Yours very truly,
H. C. GARDINER.

Lettice did not love injustice. It made her blood boil. She was angrier than Gardiner himself. She understood the feeling which made him refuse her letters. It was not a mere cutting off his nose to spite his face; it was a real idiosyncrasy of taste, akin to that which spoiled for him the "set piece" loveliness of Frahan. What he disliked there was not the bodily presence of the tourists — he would have felt just the same under the midwinter moon — but the taint

left by their eyes, which spread a film of defilement over the whole lovely scene. Even so the Governor's eyes deflowered and defiled her letters. Absurd and fanciful, no doubt; but it was just those streaks of the fantastic that made him attractive to Lettice.

She could not get him out of her head. What must it be for him, with his anchorite ways, to be under supervision, day and night, through the accursed little spy-hole in the door of his cell? Lettice knew all about that spy-hole now. Since receiving his letter she had read every book about prisons that the Museum could supply. Turning over, sifting, arranging her deductions, she had reached a fairly correct estimate of his state of mind.

Denis she had not seen since they parted at Rochehaut. Using a sort of defensive frankness, he had told her by letter about Dorothea's sojourn at Bredon, which he could do quite naturally without touching on their personal relations. Lettice tried to read between the lines, but Denis in those months had traveled too far for her to follow, at least on paper. He had of course attended to give evidence before the Borough Bench; he had seen Gardiner then, and once since. "I wish the confounded place weren't at the other end of the earth," he wrote. "I can't possibly get up there again at present; it's not fair on Wandesforde; he wants the seaplane finished for the Olympia show, and it'll take me every minute of my time. Mr. Gardiner was up in November, but now I hear he's sick; and Tom, the brother, is stationed at Queenstown, so he's no good. Which means that Harry's seen no one for a month. I don't like it. It's too long. I'm rather badly worried about him." And, as an afterthought, written across the top: "Why don't you run down there yourself? I wish you would."

That letter came to Lettice on a day of December fog, which had found its way into the Museum. Overhead in a smelly haze the arc lamps waxed and dwindled, milky moons, each with its pin-point core of white incandescence; and on all sides tremendous sneezes went resounding like minute guns round the dome. Any regular attendant of the

reading-room may become a connoisseur in sneezes. Lettice herself sneezed at times, a minute one-syllable explosion like a kitten's. She was always a slow worker, slow but accurate; to-day her pen moved more deliberately than ever. Then it stopped and she sat immobile, staring at nothing. . . . *Explicit*: she got up: within five minutes she had returned her books, retrieved her umbrella from the cloak-room, and was out in the street. She caught the midnight express from Euston, and reached Westby at eight the next morning.

Visitors were not admitted to the prison until ten. Lettice spent her time of waiting in a church near by. When the hour struck she was at the gates, which were set, huge and gloomy, under an arch in the outer wall. No one else was waiting. Lettice tugged at the bell chain. A slip door in the carriage gate was opened by a porter, to whom she stated her errand. She was handed over to a warder, who led her across a court laid out in grass and flower-beds to the second gate, in a wall thirty feet high. Beyond this was a vestibule closed by an iron grille—the third gate; beyond, again, the central hall of the prison.

Wards radiated from it in all directions like the spokes of a wheel; each a long rectangle lined with cells, tier above tier, regular as a honeycomb, all the way up to the roof. Across the central well a light iron staircase zigzagged from story to story. The walls were gray, the woodwork tan-brown, the floor of concrete: all was clean, commonplace, tragic. At each landing a stout wire-netting inclosed the staircase. Lettice's guide pointed it out. "See that, miss? That's to prevent 'em throwing themselves over. They *will* do it, if you give 'em the chance. We'd a man here last year as threw himself down from that top landing up there. Cracked his skull he did, and cracked the paving-stone too, that's more! He was in hospital for a bit, but he got over it, and took his discharge; and if you'll believe me, miss, six months after we'd got him back for something else."

The remand cells were not in this part of the prison. Lettice was taken to a waiting-room to get the necessary

permit, and then led on through many corridors. She caught glimpses of cells as she passed, and saw prisoners, in their ugly drab uniforms, sweeping and scrubbing the floors. They stared at her with avid, furtive curiosity which made her feel half ashamed of her freedom. She saw Gardiner in those debased figures, cringing out of the way at the officer's curt word of command. "Here you are, miss!" said he at last, briskly unlocking one of those innumerable doors: and Lettice passed in.

She saw a cell like any of the others and a figure sitting under the window reading. The book went down on the floor, anyhow and anywhere, as he started to his feet.

"Lettice!"

Till that moment Lettice had been doubtful of her mission; after it she doubted no more. She stood, letting him hold her hands; she did not speak; she could not have found words, if she had tried, for the contraction of her throat. Gardiner was clutching her like a drowning man. Dim shades of feeling passed across his face, like wind over a corn-field. He was yellow as a lemon and bony as a castaway, but the worst was to see him so near to losing control. For a moment Lettice was afraid he would break down altogether. But with a mighty effort he pulled round, released her hands and began to talk almost in a natural way.

"Well, this is most fearfully noble of you! How in the world did you find your way here? You surely didn't come up on purpose?"

"I thought I would like to see what a prison is like," explained Lettice in her delicate, deliberate way. She sat down on the chair he offered and looked round his domain. Gardiner rented a "private room" about eight feet square, lighted by a strip of ground glass, which was set immediately under the ceiling, well out of reach. An iron spring bedstead was reared against the wall. The mattress and striped blanket, neatly buttoned into a roll, were stowed under a bracket in the corner. This bracket held books; a second, in the corresponding corner opposite, had a tin mug and plate. The jug and basin, also of tin, stood on the floor.

Lettice had the only chair, and Gardiner might sit on his thumbs. There was no other furniture.

"I haven't seen a soul for months," he said, contemplating her with admiring gratitude. "Denis has been inseparably wedded to that darned aeroplane of his, and my daddy's in bed, bless his heart. You don't know how one gets to pine after somebody from outside. It's a piece of luck, too, having it to ourselves like this. I had to interview Denis in the visitors' room, under the eye of a warder. But when my daddy came to see me he raked up such an appalling amount of dust that ever since, as a special concession, I've been allowed to see visitors here. My daddy is rather talented at raking up a dust. I can do it, too, but not so tactfully as he does. The Governor simply loves daddy, but with me he's at daggers drawn. Are you looking at my choice of literature? Tom keeps me supplied, but it's no good sending anything but sixpennies, because I have to leave 'em all behind when I go, for the benefit of the prison library. *Vingt Ans Après* — jolly tale, isn't it? I always have agreed with Rochefort — je ne suis que d'un parti, c'est du parti du grand air!"

Lettice put down the book — quite quickly. "And what do you do all day?" she asked.

"What do I do? Would you like a time-table? I get up about five, have breakfast, then tidy my room. Chapel's at seven; visitors between ten and twelve; exercise between eleven and twelve, if it's fine — if it's wet I don't get any. That's about the worst part of this place. I told the Governor one day it would do me less harm to get soaked outside than to dry-rot in here, but he wouldn't see it. A rule is a rule. Silly business, what?"

"But what do you do? Don't you go out to work?"

He shook his head, laughing. "I'm still innocent. I don't mix with the convicted prisoners. I should be allowed to work at my own trade in my cell, if they had the necessary tools; but I'm afraid they're not likely to import a hotel to be run. I've sewn mail-bags from time to time, when I got very bored."

"Then do you mean to say you're in this, this, this — this horrid little hole of a place the whole day long when it's raining, and all except one hour when it isn't?"

He laughed again. "Lettice, what a first-class rebel you'd make! I never knew any one sit down more uncomfortably under what you think injustice than you do!"

To that Lettice said nothing; she never would talk about herself. "And does nobody come to see you?" she asked.

"To be sure they do. The chaplain's perseveringly chatty; he's another who fell a victim to my daddy. The doctor's been once — and that was really rather funny. You know, by a most odd coincidence, he was actually at the Easedale at the time of the row — was called to view the body and gave evidence at the inquest. Of course it's not etiquette for him to remember that now, and you may bet he doesn't! Only we look at each other with what you might call an eye. I'm not his regular patient yet, but I shall be when I'm convicted."

"You think you will be convicted?"

"Sure of it. So is my lawyer; I made him practically own it last time he was here. He wouldn't say how long I shall get, though — I suppose it's impossible to forecast. Three days, or three months, or three years, either's on the cards. It's a thoroughly sentimental case, and I've no doubt Mrs. Trent will appeal strongly to the sensibilities of the jury. But the law isn't sentimental, praise the pigs!"

"I wish you would tell me exactly what happened at Grasmere."

"Why, I did, didn't I? Trent came down spoiling for a fight, and I set out to tame his savage breast. I soon had him drinking out of my hand, and then he began to be confidential. I stood it as long as I could, Denis simmering like a kettle in the background, and then I up and shied the first thing that came to hand at his head. You read the report of the inquest, didn't you? It was all there, bar that last exchange of courtesies. I believe I called him a filthy swine."

"Why?"

"Because he was one, to be sure."

"What had he been saying?"

"Really, do you think that's a nice question for a young lady?"

"I was only thinking it might have been something inexcusably bad."

"How do you mean?"

"If he had been talking about Mrs. Trent."

She took Gardiner's breath away. "Well, you certainly have an imagination!" he said. "Don't go making suggestions of that kind to any one else, I beg!"

"It would have meant your getting off."

"It would have been the deuce and all for Mrs. Trent."

To that again Lettice answered nothing, but her under lip hardened slightly. She glanced at her watch. Five minutes more. Looking up, she met Gardiner's eyes fixed on her in urgent and unmistakable appeal. For a moment Lettice quailed. She saw something very big, very grave approaching, and she wanted ignominiously to run away. In all her generous giving there was always a reserve, a barrier of privacy, the fenced garden and the fountain sealed where she walked alone. But if he wanted to come in there for sanctuary — well, he must, it was no good, she could not deny him: this was not the time to think of herself.

"Lettice," he began — and for the first time she noticed his use of her name — "Lettice, there's one thing I want to tell you. You think I was caught red-handed in the act of bolting. It wasn't so. I had made up my mind to go back and give myself up. I was just off to do it when they arrested me. And I want you to know that it was all you — what you had said in town. I couldn't go on with it after that."

"I'm glad," said Lettice.

"I'm glad too," said Gardiner, his voice shaking, "partly, at any rate. I should be altogether glad if I were sure about the future."

"The future?"

"If I'm convicted. If I get a long sentence. If I have

to stand much more of this — Lettice! I can't humbug you. I've told Denis a stack of lies as high as a house, of which he may or may not believe one-third. I *can't* let him see the truth, because it's his evidence that's going to convict me. He has enough on his shoulders without that, poor old chap. But you — I don't care how much you know. And I want your help. I'm afraid."

She looked at him, questioning.

"I'm afraid," he repeated under his breath, lower than a whisper. The perspiration started on his forehead. "I'm not like Denis, you know. He's A1 quality, sound all through — if he wanted to go wrong I believe he wouldn't know the way! But I'm different. I'm second-rate. I ought not to be, being the son of my daddy, but I haven't kept up to his standard. He doesn't see it, bless his heart; but you do, and Denis does, though he tries to blind his eyes, and even Tom — in his heart of hearts he can't help feeling that his brother is a bit of a bounder. Oh yes, I always know when I grate on people. I see my own shortcomings plainer than any of you. I'm second-rate in manners, and in morals, and in essential stuff." He looked straight at her, and though Lettice could have contradicted him, she did not; for she saw what he meant, and was not afraid to admit to herself that there was a measure of truth in his self-condemnation. "Thanks," said Gardiner, with a fleeting smile, bending his head in acknowledgment of her honesty. "That's me, and I never forget it. I wanted to put you wise before I went on to what I have to say. I can just stand this now because it's not final. I still hope to get out in February, though I may swear I don't. I daren't leave off hoping it. I'm holding on to that. But if — if it isn't — If I get a long sentence — years, perhaps — I'm afraid, Lettice. I — I — I'm *afraid of myself*. . . . So may I hold on to you? May I tell myself that I can come to you when it's over?"

"Yes," said Lettice.

Against the drag of his urgent need she stood like a rock in flood-time. It was not merely love that drew them to-

gether; for lovers, even devoted lovers, may part without injury to their characters; sometimes, indeed, to their own ultimate gain. But these two could not have parted without grave loss and damage, especially to Gardiner. Yes, and to Lettice also; for he called out faculties which but for him would have slept for ever in comfortable laziness. Instinct drove them together, as two drops of water are driven to coalesce. He had her hands again in a desperate clutch; for a moment he rested his forehead on them.

"Time's up, miss," said the warder at the door.

Lettice freed herself without haste or embarrassment.

"Till February, then," said she.

"You're surely not coming up to the trial?"

"Of course I am," said Lettice.

CHAPTER XX

ROUGH JUSTICE

A true witness delivereth souls.— PROVERBS.

LATE in February a blizzard swept over the north; it was followed by still, intense, stringent cold. By night the fogs were dense; by day the white world glittered in sunshine. Trees of snow-blossom and iron filigree raised their heads, as white as plumes, against a china-blue sky. Posts, hedges, buildings, snow-hooded and sparkling, rising out of pearly frost-haze, threw azure shadows on the softly rippled velvet of the drift. Country lanes were buried many feet deep, but a passage had been carved down the Westby road; the slow carts, lumbering in to market, crunched their way between tall, strange, silvery and chalky-white cliffs, like the sugar icing on a bridecake, along tracks made golden with the scattered sand. The sun found rainbows in the icicles and diamonds in the snow, but it did not melt them; and at night, under the sweet influences of the Pleiades and the jeweled bands of Orion, the frost struck deeper and deeper into the earth, the ice grew thicker and thicker on the steely lakes.

In spite of the weather, Westby was full. Not only was it market-day, but the Assizes were on, with a sensational case. Everybody knew that the late owner of the Easedale Hotel was to be tried for killing one of his own guests. The celebrated Hancock, K.C., had been retained for the Crown; and Bullard, for the defense, was only less popular. Moreover, the case was to be tried before Mr. Justice Beckwith, who was said to be dead nuts on crimes of violence. Blue look-out for the prisoner, every one agreed. The court was crowded, stuffy, and bitterly cold. Mr. Gardiner, a valorous

and pathetic little figure, shivered and coughed under his rusty inverness. Tom was doing his best to keep him covered up; but as often as he tucked the capes round his father's shoulders, that perverse and petulant invalid tossed them back. "I can't listen stuffed up like that!" he complained.

Tom was gloomy. This was the second day of the trial; he had heard Hancock open for the Crown, he had listened to the evidence of the police, Dr. Scott, Miss Marvin, Louisa; and he felt it was all up with his brother. What was more, he knew that Kellett the lawyer thought so too. "It's unlucky, most unlucky, that Mr. Gardiner can't remember Major Trent's actual words," was all he would say when they discussed it; and he pulled a very long face on hearing the name of the judge. "Beckwith? Well, he hasn't a reputation for leniency, certainly!" Tom was fully expecting penal servitude. He saw no ray of hope. Unless, by any wild chance—there were those unexpected and seemingly aimless questions which Bullard had put to Miss Marvin, questions about the rooms and the other guests—was it possible that they had a hidden meaning? Had something fresh turned up at the last minute? Had Kellett a surprise up his sleeve? No, Tom decided, it was not possible, it was absurd to imagine it. He returned to his gloom.

As to the prisoner, he had summoned just enough surface gayety to take in the reporters and his father, whose eyes were dim; but beneath it he looked sick, and sorry, and desperately tired. Heavy lines were drawn to the corners of his mouth, and his jaw-bone stuck out, gaunt and ugly, from hollows under the ear where his neck was corded like an old man's. Tom could see his throat swelling with suppressed yawns; but he woke up at any stir among the spectators. Again and again his eyes went questing eagerly round the benches. What was he looking for? Tom had no idea. He had never heard of Lettice Smith.

"Who's that? Who is it going into the box now, Tom?"

"That's Mrs. Trent, sir."

General thrill in court. Dorothea had resumed her

widow's weeds together with her married name; and very young she looked, and fair, and pathetic, under the flowing veil. From Hancock's point of view, this was as it should be. It would take a deal of sentiment to make her past proceedings go down with the jury. Perhaps Dorothea knew this. Perhaps she was playing to the gallery. Perhaps, on the other hand, she was only playing to herself — acting what she knew she ought to feel, in order to persuade herself that she did feel it. Dorothea was a great hand at believing what she wanted to. However that might be, she was undoubtedly pathetic; and with her romantic story fresh in their minds from Hancock's opening speech, the jury were duly impressed.

She struck the right note at once. "My husband was *not* intoxicated!" she said indignantly. "He was only very, very anxious for my comfort!" Half-a-dozen credible witnesses had sworn that Trent *was* intoxicated, but no matter; the point was that, after nearly a year of marriage, he appeared as still a hero to his wife. Next came Dorothea's own part in the drama. She described the scene: the lamp on the floor, the confusion of both men, Denis's attempt to keep her out, Gardiner's unconcealed terror. "I told him he had murdered my husband, and he didn't deny it. He cowered back against the wall with his arm across his eyes, so, but he never attempted to deny it!" She told how, kneeling on the floor beside her dead husband, she had come upon the chisel. "I slipped it under my cloak. No, I didn't mean to hide it. It was only that I — I — I *couldn't* speak just then. I was thinking of my husband." Was it art that made her voice fail, or nature? "I don't know what happened next. I don't remember speaking to my maid. I don't remember anything. I think I fainted. I was ill afterwards. No, I didn't accuse the prisoner later on because I knew it wouldn't be any good. I was sure in my own mind that he had killed my husband, but I had no proof. I knew people would say it was just my fancy. So then I set myself to get proofs —"

Because he knew it was bound to come out, Hancock took

her through the story of her attempt on Gardiner. That gun must be surrendered to the enemy, but he would see that it was spiked first. Dorothea's behavior must be palliated by showing her fanatical devotion to her husband. No need to dwell on the scene at the crucifix, what Gardiner himself called the shilling-shocker part of the affair. Both sides were equally anxious to leave that in a decent obscurity. "Yes, I did pretend to be friends with him, and I did ask him, as a friend, to tell me the truth," Dorothea defiantly avowed. "Yes, I did know I was being hateful, and mean, and contemptible. But what did that matter? I had to see justice done!" Jael, and Judith, and Charlotte Corday — and Dorothea Trent? Her story ended in a storm of tears, which broke, strange to say, after she had done with Gardiner and was telling of her sojourn at Dent-de-lion. But no one in court dreamed of connecting her emotion with that part of her tale.

"I'd be sorry to be a Broad Churchman and not believe in hell," Mr. Gardiner commented with gusto. "Who's this now, Tom?"

"That? Oh, that's Merion-Smith — poor beggar!"

Another general stir. This was due partly to Denis's profession (for airmen weren't so common in the Lakes then as they have since become), and partly to his dramatic share in the story. A whisper went round, which was the well-informed telling the ignorant about the inquest. Denis's chin went up a shade higher. He had set his back against his family tree, and looked down arrogantly through his eyeglass on the court and all therein. It was plain he meant to give trouble.

The beginning ran smoothly. He told of Trent's intrusion, bending aside the questions to show how Gardiner had gone out of his way to avoid a quarrel. This was familiar ground; not so the conversation that had followed. Counsel would fain have passed over the details of Trent's discourse, but Denis intended the court to hear as much as he could possibly get in. Out came the story of the little girl at Chatham, sounding twice as bad by contrast on Denis's lips.

The prisoner grinned. While ostensibly giving his evidence with distaste and reluctance (and indeed both sentiments were genuine enough), Denis was supplying the best, the only excuse for his friend. Vainly did his questioner try to show him as the straight-laced Puritan, to whom the mildest of jokes is an offense. Denis would not fit into the part.

"At last, when we had stood as much as we could, the prisoner suggested it was gettin' late. Trent made a joking answer. What he said was grossly offensive, worse than anything before. The prisoner caught up a chisel and flung it at his head. No, it was not premeditated. No, there had been no quarrel. Simply, the man was saying indecencies that had to be stopped, and the prisoner took the first way of stoppin' them—and if he hadn't, I'd've done it myself," Denis put in, unasked. "No, I can't remember what it was he said—"

Instantly Hancock pricked up his ears. "You don't remember what Major Trent said?"

"I do not. Not the exact words."

"Not any of them?"

"Not to swear to."

"Indeed! Yet you could tell us in detail all about his other speeches?"

"Not so," Denis corrected, rather stiff. "I did not tell you in detail, I told you in substance. That is quite another thing."

"With considerable fullness and fluency, however," said his questioner dryly. "Well, then: you remember all these other stories, so far as you do remember them, but you have forgotten every single word of this—which you say was the worst of all? Can't you give us the substance of that too?"

"It was not a story," said Denis, now very stiff indeed, "it was a few broken sentences. I can't remember them accurately, and I won't make guesses. I dismissed them from memory as soon as I could. I don't burden my mind with pornographic details."

"Quite so; but surely without infringing either truth or decency you can give us some rough idea as to what this mysterious speech was about? Was it about a woman, for example?"

Denis remained obstinately silent.

"Can't remember even that? Only you are sure it was offensive?"

"It was insufferable."

The barrister leaned forward persuasively. "How about this for a suggestion? I put it to you: was it not to the prisoner personally that the deceased was offensive? And did not the prisoner lose his temper, and retaliate by throwing the chisel?"

"Nothing of the sort. I have told you before: there was no quarrel of any kind. The deceased was laughing up to the last moment, and what the prisoner did was done in the interests of decency. It was impossible to sit still and listen to the things that were comin' out of that man's mouth."

"Come, come, Mr. Smith! As a man of the world, are you going to ask us to believe that the prisoner—who, I gather, has knocked about all over the world, in countries which aren't precisely like a Sunday school—do you seriously expect us to understand that he was so much upset by an ordinary after-dinner story as to lose all self-control, and endanger his liberty, if not his life?"

"I do not expect you to understand anything," said Denis, serenely insolent. "I was addressin' the gentlemen of the jury."

"Why can't he speak out? What's he hiding?" Mr. Gardiner whispered feverishly to Tom. Tom could only shake his head and pull his mustache. Certain memories were stirring uncomfortably. What was it Harry had said about having his hands tied, not being free to explain? He had never given it another thought until this minute.

Meanwhile Denis, already convicted of tampering with the truth on behalf of his friend (for every one believed he had suppressed a speech that told against the prisoner), was

being taken through the rest of his evidence. Hancock was trying to show his bias: that he would twist the truth in Gardiner's favor, and tell only the minimum against him. In this topsy-turvy business Denis was virtually on the side of the defense. He had to suffer for his sympathies. His self-respect was stripped bare. Yet it was only by guesswork that Gardiner could divine his feelings; the harder Fate hit him, the stiffer grew his back. How Gardiner envied that effortless and natural control!

Hancock finished, and counsel for the defense rose to cross-examine. Bullard, K.C., was a long, lank, untidy figure, and had a hesitating, negligent way of speech. He began with some unimportant minor points slurred over in the examination-in-chief. Then came a pause, during which he gazed at his brief, the people whispered, and the prisoner yawned. Then a bombshell.

"I have only one more question to trouble you with, Mr. Merion-Smith," he said, looking up. "Did the deceased, in that last speech which you cannot remember, make any mention of Mrs. Trent?"

Denis's head went up with a jerk. A thrill went round the court, but was instantly stilled. Bullard was repeating his question in another form.

"Did not the prisoner suggest that Mrs. Trent would be tired; and did not the deceased answer by a coarse allusion to her state of health?"

The witness was seen to struggle for words — in vain.

"Thank you, that will do."

Upon this followed the luncheon interval. Through the excited crowd Tom carried off his father to a quiet inn near by, where he had ordered lunch. The old man sat over the fire with his basin of soup (he would take nothing else, and did not drink that), shrunken, and silent, and aged. Once he looked up piteously. "What does it mean, Tom? What does it all mean?" Tom could only answer: "I've no idea, sir. Shall I go and see if I can get hold of Kellett?" But Mr. Gardiner shook his head and crouched closer to the fire, muttering: "No, no. Time enough, time enough."

We shall hear it all presently." Tom, though he was longing to find the lawyer, durst not leave him.

The court was crowded to its last seat when they reassembled, and Bullard opened for the defense. He was a clever advocate; perhaps a little too clever. He was apt to hint his points instead of making them, to cut and refine his phrases like some fastidious literary artist. This is not the way to get a verdict from plain men accustomed to plain language, clear outlines, the black and white of fact. They do not understand half-tones and intellectual subtleties. On the other hand, Bullard had a reputation for incorruptible honesty; and he rose at times to eloquence.

He began, in his negligent way, to recapitulate the facts, a touch here and there serving to rearrange them to the prisoner's advantage. He did not, he said, propose to deny that his client had thrown the tool; but he submitted that the evidence proved, first, that the death of the deceased was due to the fall and not to the blow; second, that if he had been perfectly sober he would not have fallen. Very lucid was he, very persuasive. But his audience was waiting for what was to come.

"Finally, gentlemen, I hope to show that in throwing that chisel the prisoner was guilty of no crime; rather that he was the necessary unofficial policeman of the moral law. There are still," he went on, dwelling on the words like an epicure, "there are still offenses which are not amenable to ordinary justice, which can be dealt with only by . . . punching the offender's head, cramming his words back down his own throat. This was such a case. Look first at the dead man." He broke off to give a summary of Trent's glorious-inglorious career: the ribbon on the one hand, disgrace on the other. "Brilliant promise, you see, marred by a single fault. 'It was never wine with me'—we have that on his own authority; it was a fouler vice. The man was rotten: still showing a fair outside, still preserving some traits of kindness, but black-rotten within. When a decent man gets a glimpse of that sort of thing, he doesn't stay to argue; he hits out.

"Now in defending the prisoner I was met at first by a singular difficulty. Neither he nor the only known witness of the scene could remember the words which provoked the outbreak. Strange, you will say; most strange; suspicious, even. Surely they could make some sort of rough guess? But no, both persisted; they could not. What pointed the moral was the fact that these two were conferring together at the moment of the prisoner's arrest. It looked like a conspiracy of silence. Now why should they conspire to keep silence? In order to hide some fact damaging to the prisoner. That is the obvious deduction, which of course you have already drawn. And, gentlemen, the prisoner would have left it at that: he would have let your judgment go by default against him, and taken the consequences: you would never have heard the facts, never, but for a totally unexpected circumstance, which came to my knowledge not forty-eight hours ago.

"There was another witness to that scene in the hotel. Unknown to my client or to his friend, another of the guests saw and overheard everything that happened. I shall not attempt to summarize this testimony. I shall leave it in the witness's own words, and I shall leave you to draw your own conclusions; asking you to bear in mind, as you do so, the story of her dealings with the prisoner which you have heard from Mrs. Trent.

"This only I will say: We men of the law, seeing nothing but meanness and crime, day after day, year after year, grow sometimes to despair of the world, to see nothing before it but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. Acts such as the prisoner's redress the balance. They show us once again the sense of tears in mortal things, the indestructible nobility of the human heart, the God in human nature. 'Through such souls alone God stooping shows sufficient of his light for us i' the dark to rise by.' Gentlemen, I should like to thank the prisoner.

"Call Lætitia Jane Smith."

Lettice stepped into the witness-box. She did not look at

Gardiner, gazing at her with his haggard eyes as at a dream come true; nor at Dorothea, shrinking away like a child from the lash. Self-withdrawn and expressionless, she looked straight at the examining counsel, and to him alone she gave her evidence.

Yes, she had been staying at the prisoner's hotel on the night in question. She had gone there to meet her cousin, Mr. Merion-Smith. She had not told him that she meant to do so; she wanted to take him by surprise. She engaged a room on the ground floor of the west wing. She did not go in to dinner, nor did she try to see her cousin that evening, because she had a bad headache. She stayed in her room writing. About ten o'clock she went out for a breath of air. She came back at twenty-two minutes past ten. How did she know the time? Because she stopped to set her watch by the clock in the hall. Afterwards she went straight to her room. It was in darkness, but the room opposite, the prisoner's room, was lighted up. Her window and his were both open. She could see in clearly. The distance was not great. She had very good sight. "I can read the papers in your hand," said Lettice concisely. There were three persons in the room: her cousin, sitting by the window; the prisoner, at the table; and a third man, whom from a photograph she had since identified as Major Trent, leaning back against the mantelpiece. Major Trent was speaking. He seemed to be finishing some story. He was laughing. The prisoner did not laugh, nor did Mr. Merion-Smith. The latter leaned forward and spoke to the prisoner, and the prisoner answered. She could not hear what was said because they spoke in whispers. Her cousin seemed angry. "He was bristling all over," said Lettice. The prisoner then turned and addressed the deceased. Yes, she could hear that. What he said? He suggested it was getting late, and that Mrs. Trent would be tired. Was she sure he mentioned Mrs. Trent? Quite. Major Trent said, "Oh, my wife!" and burst out laughing. He came up to the table, leaned across to the prisoner, and added another

sentence. Yes, she had heard every word. Yes, she remembered every word. Would she tell the court exactly what it was?

Lettice looked back at her questioner and answered him alone, isolating him and herself, as though judge, jury, prisoner, and spectators did not exist. She spoke with colorless precision:

"He said, 'Ever hear of what they call an interesting situation? Damn uninteresting I find it—especially to look at!'"

The truth was out. Useless for Hancock to cross-examine; not a soul in court but knew they had the facts at last. The jury made up their minds upon their verdict. As juries often do, they had set up among themselves a standard of rough justice, and neither the prisoner's own statement nor the judge's summing up could avail to change them. If Lettice had not spoken, they would have found the prisoner guilty; if he himself had not tried to evade justice, they would have found him innocent. As it was, their verdict was a compromise. Guilty of manslaughter, but very strongly recommended to mercy.

Mr. Justice Beckwith may have thought he was carrying out their recommendation in sentencing Gardiner to nine months' imprisonment in the second division.

CHAPTER XXI

HEU QUAM MUTATUS

When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? — **EZEKIEL.**

THE prison gates shut. Silence fell. The troubled waters settled into calm. Tom went back to Queenstown; Mr. Gardiner to Woodlands—and to bed, with a couple of nurses in attendance. Denis was presumably at Dent-de-lion, working for the Aero Show. Mrs. Trent had gone no one knew whither. And Lettice, her duty done, had escaped unmolested to her attic in Pimlico, where she settled back into her groove, with that sort of capillary attraction towards the inconspicuous and the ordinary, which marked her conduct always except when she was making one of her gravely calculated excursions into the extraordinary.

Why had she held her tongue? Her friends did not need to be told. "It's Lettice all over!" said Gardiner himself, half fond, half laughing. She had had two main motives (or rather springs of action; for "motive" implies conscious volition, whereas Lettice did simply without thinking what came natural) — the one a principle, the other a prejudice. First, she would never, if she could possibly avoid it, interfere in other people's affairs—that was the principle; and second, with every taste and instinct she hated to be made conspicuous—that was the prejudice, and a tough one.

With these reasons against speaking, moreover, she saw none for. It never entered her head that some people might say she had treated Gardiner unfairly, in letting him tell his tale while keeping her own knowledge in reserve. What

difference could it possibly make? Why should she have spoken? It would only have made him very uncomfortable, and Denis would simply have hated it. All this, of course, rested on the assumption of her own detachment, insulation, negligibility: in which Lettice was so rooted and grounded that she was quite surprised to find other people surprised by what to her came natural as breathing.

Her explanation, given in court, ran something as follows:—"I didn't speak before the inquest because I know there were two other witnesses, and I didn't see I was wanted; and after it, by the time I heard what had happened, it was too late. There would have been no sense in disturbing things again. It would have been bad for everybody all round, and worst for Mrs. Trent. But now — now things were different. I had to speak now. It was time for the truth to come out."

Full time. Best for Dorothea, as well as for her victim. She had been screened, and in the darkness evil things had grown up. Down with all screens now. In the light of truth, the whole jumble resolved itself into order. Honor to whom honor was due; judgment to whom judgment. Even Gardiner's sentence fell into place. It might be too heavy for the particular offense; but no one knew better than himself that it was the just penalty for his months of cowardice.

February passed into March, a sweet, mild March: blue skies, brown buds, thrushes singing, daisies on every lawn, violets round every bush, white and golden daffodils ruffling under the trees, flood-water glistening like frosted silver among tender blades of grass. Towards the end of the month the prisoner saw his first visitor. Mr. Gardiner, being still too weak to go himself, sent Tom. Tom's impressions were recorded in a duty letter to Miss Smith: "I saw my brother for a few minutes yesterday in the presence of a warder. He seems very fairly cheerful and fit. His work is in the printing room. He asked me to let you know he is going strong." Dry crumbs! Lettice's consolation was that Mr. Gardiner would be no better satisfied than herself, and

that next month he would send Denis. Denis had at least a tongue in his head. That is to say, he used to have—unless—

A few days later she received another letter, this time from her cousin. He inclosed tickets for the Aero Show. "I know these things aren't much in your line, but you can give them away to somebody or other. As a matter of fact, we've not much worth seeing on our stand this year. The seaplane didn't get done after all. Yes, I may be in town for the week-end, but I'm afraid I shan't be able to look you up. Better luck next time, perhaps." And overleaf, a hastily scribbled postscript: "I suppose you've heard nothing from Westby? I've just had a line from Mr. Gardiner: he says Harry's been in a row—insubordination and assaulting a warder—and all letters and visits are stopped off for the next two months. No particulars, only that. I was to have gone down there next month, you know, but of course that's off now. Bad job, isn't it?"

Lettice laid down the letter with an unaccustomed sinking of the heart. Of the postscript she utterly refused to let herself think; it was bad enough without that. It was not the first time she had felt uneasy about her cousin. How often had she seen him since Westby? Not once; yet formerly they had met, as a matter of course, whenever he came to town. Formerly, too, he had written to her regularly every week—by an unexpected trait, Denis was a graphic writer, just as with his friends he was a garrulous talker; in that came out his Irish blood. Now she might think herself lucky if she heard once a month; and what things his letters were, when they came! The last had been an essay on the uses of the deck or cable plane. This present one—well, this was the climax. Over and over again, whenever he mentioned the Show (and it had been his staple conversation for months), she had been given to understand that she was to be taken to Olympia, and dragged round the exhibits, and stuffed with information whether she liked it or not; and that her guide was to be no other than himself.

Lettice faced the conclusion that there was something wrong.

By this and by that, by what she had seen herself and by what Gardiner had said at Westby, she had gathered how things stood between Denis and Dorothea. What would be the effect of such a shock? Lettice found herself unable to guess. Up to a certain point, Denis was transparent; for years she had read him like a book, and had been able to predict not merely what he would do or say, but the very gesture and accent with which he would do or say it. Dear Denis, tried friend, good as good bread, in Gardiner's expressive idiom, pig-headed Ulsterman with those dark blue Southern Irish eyes, truculent fighter answering to the lightest touch of her silken rein! — Lettice was a good lover, and she had given him of her best. But now — now, like Gardiner, she found herself up against a door that had no key. What was going on inside? What was Denis doing there, to heal him of his deadly wound? She did not know — she could not guess. But one thing was certain: he would accept no help. Gardiner in his weakness had cried out to her and rested on her strength; but Denis was neither weak nor dependent. Whatever went on behind the closed door was between him and his God.

Lettice picked up the tickets again. "He's sent me these things because he felt he must, but he doesn't mean me to use them," ran her slow thoughts. "I expect that means he's going to be there himself. Up for the week-end; then he'll probably go on the Saturday —"

Lettice rarely framed a definite resolution, but after long brooding her thoughts would settle into a sediment of purpose. The outcome of that hiatus was that on Saturday she put on her best things and went to Olympia to see for herself.

The whole floor space of the exhibition hall was cut up into a chess-board of stands, each one carpeted with red felt and inclosed in a white railing. Within these crimson plots might be seen every variety of *aéroplane*. Pusher, tractor, hydroplane, bat-boat, super-marine, the names

sounded very imposing, but to the uninstructed (*videlicet* to Lettice) they all looked as much alike as a crowd of Chinamen. Visitors might wander about at will, stooping under huge pale arching wings, or mounting steps to inspect the fittings of the pilot's cockpit. Lettice had expected to be bored, but she was not. At that time, before it became mechanically perfect and virtually fool-proof, while its imperfections had still to be pieced out with human skill and daring, the aeroplane was no machine but an individual. Denis and his fellows talked of particular planes as a man talks of particular hunters in his stable.

After wandering round the stands, and duly gazing at the Smith monoplane, Lettice retired to the tea-room where she established herself in a corner behind a group of palms. Be it understood that she had come strictly to see, not to speak to her cousin; she knew she could dodge his short-sighted eyes. This being the last day of the show, the hall was full. All the flying world seemed to be there. Celebrities were thick as blackberries in the woods above Frahan; here a young mechanic who had become famous in a day, there a hereditary legislator who had ended his last race (luckily the incident hadn't got into the papers) head downwards in a ditch. Many of the men belonged to a certain well-defined physical type, lean, wiry, and small-made. Other things being equal, the light-weight pilot has an advantage. The women, on the other hand, *rare nantes in gurgite vasto*, were mostly hothouse flowers. Lettice, of course, knew no one; she would have been quite at a loss but for her neighbor at the next table, a big man rather like a mastiff, with an incongruous soft voice, who was obligingly giving the *carte du pays* to his companion.

"See that old cock with the iron-gray hair? That's Arthur Sturt, the ironmaster; he's running the Derby Flying School, and making pots of money. Able chap; there aren't many men of sixty who have receptivity enough to believe in the aeroplane. What? Oh, certainly, sir, the compliment applies to you." He laughed, pausing to light a cigar. "The youngster eating strawberries with the flapper in a pig-

tail — got him? That's Tommy Wyatt. Riviera cup, you know. A perfect young devil. You ought to have been at Hendon last Saturday; he was putting up some wonderful stunts — simply playing cup-and-ball with his bus. Oh, I'm quite a back number these days. Soon be sixty myself, what?"

"I dare say you'll find you're good for a year or so yet," said his companion dryly. He was a lean, elderly clergyman with an adventurous eye. "By the by, is your partner here?"

The younger man shook his head. "Not he! Hasn't been near the place. I don't know what's taken him — that's to say I do, and wish I didn't. He's not done a stroke of work this year. Let me down rather badly over the sea-plane; I particularly wanted to show it. I told you about that nasty affair he was mixed up in, didn't I? For a straight-laced, fastidious fellow like him it must have been the deuce of a jolt, and of course one makes every allowance; but it's a nuisance, all the same. I'm personally sorry, too," he added. "It's a bad job when a chap of that type runs off the rails. What? Oh, no, no mistake about it, I'm afraid; she's making a perfect fool of herself. Byrne will get his divorce this time, as sure as eggs. Hullo! by George —"

"That's not he?"

"Yes, it is, though," said Wandesforde, craning forward. "Good Lord! fancy Evey Byrne letting herself be dragged to the Aero Show! She must have got it badly!"

Mrs. Byrne was a very pretty woman, and even more charming than she was pretty. She had a husband who was impossible to live with and whom she could not divorce because she was a Catholic. He had no such scruples, however; he had dragged her through the court on trumped-up evidence, and she had emerged, like Susannah, without a stain on her character. It was felt that she had been hardly used. In the circumstances, and as she knew how to give a good dinner and was popular with women as well as men, she was allowed a good deal of license. She needed it all.

She was very sweet, and very innocent, and hopelessly indiscreet, with an Irish aptitude for tumbling into scrapes. She could no more help using her lovely eyes than a violet can help smelling; and men buzzed round her always like wasps round a peach. The latest of her captives, having led her to a seat, now stood beside her with bent head to receive her instructions, while she drew the gloves off her lovely hands and arms. What Denis felt it was impossible to say; his attitude bespoke admiration, but nothing more.

She finished her directions, he nodded assent, and threaded his way through the crowd towards the buffet. Turning to retrace his steps with a nicely balanced load of tea and strawberries, he came face to face with another pair who had just come in. The encounter might have been foreseen, and indeed Lettice had given the chance a thought; for Dorothea's eyes were not, like Denis's, easy to dodge. Here she was, then, she too with a cavalier in attendance, to judge from his expression a devoted cavalier. And no wonder; Dorothea, in a long cloak of violet velvet, and a big velvet hat with sweeping plume, made an enchanting figure. Her face, which had lost its childish softness, was less pretty, but far more alluring. April was unfolding to the bloom of May.

Seeing Denis, she stopped dead; then her face broke into sunshine, she colored like a damask rose, and moved forward impulsively with outstretched hands. Denis continued on his way. The violet velvet was actually brushing his sleeve. "I beg your pardon!" he said with unmoved politeness, drawing back from contact. He rejoined his companion and sat down at her table.

For the first time in her life Lettice found herself enjoying the sight of pain.

CHAPTER XXII

BREAD AND SALT

Were you thinking how we, sitting side by side,
Might be dreaming miles and miles apart?

Two out of the Crowd.

LETTICE had had no tea, but she did not stay for it; she uprooted herself, setting back her chair without a sound, and flitted inconspicuously out of the exhibition. On her slow way home, in Tube and omnibus, she did some concentrated thinking. She was not surprised when Beatrice rushed up from the basement to inform her that a lady was waiting in her room, a dazzling lady who had arrived in a taxi-cab; she needed not Beatrice's ecstatic description to tell her who that lady was. She had caught Dorothea's eye across the hall. Well, what must be, must; screwing herself up to face a scene, she climbed the stairs.

Her visitor had not sat down; a slight sumptuous figure, she stood posed against the mantelpiece, looking down into the fire. She started at the opening door, and raised her beautiful gazelle-brown eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Lettice!"

Lettice made no reply. A wave of obstinacy rose to meet that appeal; she came to the table and stood slowly taking off and smoothing out her gloves. Lettice was sometimes possessed of a dumb devil. Dorothea's eyes opened piteously; her lip quivered, the tears tumbled down her cheeks, but in a flash she was across the room, had seized Lettice and turned her round by force.

"I don't care, you can be as angry with me as you like, but you *shall* listen, you *shall* answer, if I stay here all night. That woman — what was she doing with Denis?" Lettice was dumb. "Oh, don't *you* begin about being justly angry

and taking righteous vengeance — see what that sort of rubbish has done for me!" Dorothea cried with passion. "I *must* know about Denis. What has she done to him?"

"I should think you could see that for yourself," said Lettice, opening her lips with extreme and ungracious reluctance.

"Yes; but is she — has she —"

"Ask some of your friends; they'll know all the London gossip."

"I did ask Maurice, but he either couldn't or wouldn't tell; he said he'd been out of town. Lettice, oh, Lettice, you can't surely think — he hasn't really —"

"If you mean, do I think he's living with her, I don't know; I should think it very likely. But what does it matter to you? You've done all you wanted — you've had your revenge, and sent Mr. Gardiner to prison."

She freed her hands resolutely and turned away. Dorothea flung herself into the nearest chair. Beautiful graceful figure, with the long lines of velvet sweeping to her feet, the plumed hat, the rich hair, the ivory whiteness of cheek and throat above her dark luxurious furs! Lettice hardened her heart. Let her go back to her Maurices and her other friends — she would soon get over it. She turned away, turned her back on her visitor, and began to prepare her solitary meal as though Dorothea did not exist. There was ill will in the very curve of her shoulders.

Dorothea looked up.

"But I do love him so, Lettice!"

"*You love him?*" exclaimed Lettice, pausing with her egg on its way to the saucepan.

"Why, of course — how could any one help it?"

"You seem to have consoled yourself pretty easily," said Lettice, with a doubtful glance at the violet velvet. Dorothea's eyes followed hers.

"Consoled myself? Do you mean this? *This?*" She crushed up the velvet in her hand with scorn. "Oh, you are stupid. I didn't expect you to be stupid, Lettice, I thought you would understand. What would you have had

me do, after that — that frightful day at Westby? One can't die to order. One has to kill time somehow. I loved Denis — oh, I did, I did love him — right from the very first. You may say I led him on, but I didn't, I didn't, I never thought of such a thing, I never so much as dreamed of its being possible, till one day I woke up and just found it had happened, to us both. So then what could I do but tear it out, and deny it, and *make* myself be loyal to my husband? I — knew — yes, I suppose I did know that Guy wasn't — I'd seen things — but never anything really bad; and he was always good to me, truth he was, always. Because of my money, I suppose. But I didn't know that then. I *had* to believe in him, because he was all I had in the world. Oh! I can't talk of it; it sears me to think of those months. Lettice, Lettice, you haven't been married, you don't know how close that brings you. To find you have been mingled, made one with a nature like that — thinking, too, those hideous thoughts my husband had about me — Yes, *look* at that idea, take it home to you, if you can; and then tell yourself that, however you may try, you have *not* been married, and you don't and *can't* know what that awful intimacy means. Oh! I've been thankful, since, that my baby died. I was glad to know the truth; but it tore me in two, Lettice, indeed, indeed it did. Console myself? Why, I've been at Hendon, learning to fly. That man you saw me with, I met him there. I believe he fancies I'm going to marry him. I don't care. I don't know what I've said to him. It's all a blank. I never woke till I saw Denis. Why, that alone might have told you; should I have gone to him as I did, as though I were sure of my welcome, there in the face of everybody, if I'd known what I was doing? I didn't know. I didn't know anything, except that to see him again was like coming home; and I went to him without another thought."

Lettice, who all this while had been standing stock-still, with her egg in her spoon, began slowly to get under way. She slid the egg into the water, noted the time, straightened her shoulders, and then said, in a definitely milder tone: "Well, I don't see what you expect me to do."

"Can't we save him?"

She shook her head. "Denis goes his own way. It's no use interfering."

"If you were to say something —"

Another slow shake. "He wouldn't listen. I've seen him like this once before, with a man he'd been good to, who cheated him. He was like a stone." She paused, and added, slowly, slowly, drop by drop distilling for Dorothea's comfort the essence of her meditations in the train: "I don't suppose it will go far. Denis isn't made that way. He will soon get tired of it." "*If he wanted to go wrong, he wouldn't know the way!*" She seemed to hear Gardiner's very accents. The acuteness of the pain took her by surprise — took away her breath and stopped her words. Dorothea gave a miserable little sob.

"'Soon get tired of it!' Oh, Lettice, Lettice, but when you think of what he was!"

To that Lettice made no reply; her face was grim. After a moment she exerted herself to finish her former speech, still half unwilling, for it took her heart long to forgive, though her head now acquitted Dorothea of the worst of her guilt, of a deliberate betrayal: "As a matter of fact, I don't believe there is anything wrong yet. I believe so far he is only playing with the idea. It may go no further. He has thirty years of habit to fight against." She did not say, "To-day will probably settle it, one way or the other," but the thought was in her mind.

Dorothea had sunk down on the rug in a miserable little heap, and was propping herself against the mantelpiece. "Oh, I have been bad, I have been bad," she said on a long quivering breath, twisting her hands together, while the tears came tumbling down her cheeks and into her lap. "Oh, it doesn't seem fair that a miserable little nobody like me should be allowed to do so much harm. Oh, if there is a God, why didn't he kill me when my baby died, and have done with it? To let me, *me* hurt a man like Denis — oh, I ought to have been squashed like a blackbeetle! And Mr. Gardiner too. Wherever I go I seem to bring nothing but

trouble! Do lend me a hanky, Lettice, mine's all soppy."

"It's hardly worth while to think of Mr. Gardiner, is it?" suggested Lettice with faint irony. Dorothea raised her wet eyes.

"Why, of course I think of him, only I think of Denis more. It's everything with Denis, it was just because he wasn't like other men you couldn't help loving him. And now — now, even if he gets over it, as you say, it will never, never be the same." She stopped to swallow a sob. "But Mr. Gardiner — I know prison is horrid, and I'm sorry, oh! dreadfully sorry and ashamed whenever I think of him, but he'll come out at the end none the worse. Why, it isn't even as if it were a disgrace! You feel the same, Lettice, you know you do."

Lettice said nothing; her face might have betrayed her, had Dorothea been on the alert; but she was already back with Denis. She did not like Gardiner, and she would never understand him. But Lettice — by that naïve assumption of her prime concern for her cousin Dorothea had shown her, rather more plainly than she liked, where she stood. Her center of interest had shifted. She was scarcely sorry for Denis; she was almost angry with him. "He shouldn't have done it," she said with a touch of sternness. "I am disappointed in him." Lettice expected a good deal from her friends. Her feelings had changed, adjusting themselves unconsciously to the change in Denis. The protective instinct was dead. "When I was a child, I spake as a child. . . ." Denis had put away childish things, and as a man she judged him.

Gardiner had disappointed her too, yet with him she was not angry. His failure had been involuntary; and he had redeemed it, coming back of his own free will to put his manhood to the test. He was under the question now, this minute, every minute of the day. For the first time she let herself think of Denis's postscript: tacitly acknowledging that if she had not done so before, it was because she dared not. She could reason about Denis, she could not reason about this, though it lay in her heart like a stone all the time.

For Denis the issue was decided; whether he went to Mrs. Byrne or not, his eyes had been opened, he had tasted the fruit of the tree, he could never regain that child-like quality of which Dorothea had robbed him. If he took the one step further — well — yes, it did matter, it mattered horribly, the constriction at her heart was only less than she felt in thinking of the other sufferer. Still, it was less, for Denis would retrieve himself; Gardiner would not. If he failed now, he would be a broken man; he would go under. “Insubordination, assaulting a warder” — the words seemed ominous as thunder on a sultry night.

And meanwhile here was the fount and origin of all this trouble, sitting on the rug, leaning her small head, stuffed with tears, against the wall, a dolorous little heap: poor child, she had punished herself worse than her victims. What to do with her? Lettice had never responded with enthusiasm to Dorothea’s advances. Dorothea was intense; Lettice preferred the humdrum. Nor, as has been said, could she easily forgive. Still, if Dorothea really needed her, she supposed she would have to produce some sort of response. She moved about, laying the table, cutting the bread; presently she came to the fire to make toast. Dorothea roused herself. “Let me do that,” she said, her voice still thick and languid with tears. “You go and sit down.”

“You’ll spoil your frock,” said Lettice, with a last faintly disparaging glance at the violet velvet. Dorothea’s eyes glinted; she set her teeth, stooped down, seized the hem of her skirt between her strong little hands, and tore it, r-r-rip, half-way up to the waist.

“*That* for my frock!”

What a baby it was, after all! “Now I shall have to mend that before you can go home,” Lettice admonished her, in a tone which, for Dorothea, she had never used before.

“Don’t care,” retorted Dorothea, defiant chin in air. And then, with a swift little snuggling movement, she nestled against Lettice. “Oh, Lettice, Lettice, I’ve been bad, and hateful, and I don’t deserve to have any one like me, but — *may* I come and see you sometimes? I do seem to get into

such muddles when I'm all by myself — and I haven't any one in all the world to go to now but you ! ”

Lettice did not answer, because she was engaged in rescuing the toasting fork from her guest's heedless hand, and blowing out the flaming bread. She scraped off the cinders, and with a firmness that admitted no question put that piece on her own plate, and the other, which she had made herself, on Dorothea's.

“ Now come and have your tea,” was her sole reply.

Bread and salt — they ate it together.

CHAPTER XXIII

DIEU DISPOSE

I thought to promote thee unto great honor, but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honor.—NUMBERS.

At the moment when Lettice and Dorothea were sitting down to bread and salt in Canning Street, Denis was leaning over a rustic bridge in the garden of Mrs. Byrne's week-end cottage.

By what difficult, obscure, and tortuous paths he had been wandering in those days he could not have told, nor could any one have followed. Dorothea had done him the worst injury; she had broken his faith. His love and his religion were so closely intertwined that they fell together, with a crash that numbed sensation. The world turned gray and all the lamps went out. If he could not believe in God, Denis could believe in nothing and love nothing. He did not know what was wrong with him; he was not actively and consciously unhappy, but he was bored — sick of himself, sick of his work, sick of all he had been and done in all his life before.

He stayed on at Bredon from force of habit, because it was too much trouble to make up his mind to go elsewhere. The trial at Westby broke this routine; and the heavy sentence on his friend, outraging his sense of justice, snapped another of the links that held him to his former life. What was the good of virtue, he asked himself (seriously, as a novel idea), if this was to be its reward? What had he ever got by it himself? Why shouldn't he try pleasure for a change? Why not, indeed? Conscience made no protest; that was one of the lamps which had gone out. When he left Westby he did not go back to Bredon; he

stayed in town, with the deliberate intention of "seeing life."

In pursuit of this ambition he visited music halls, which he regarded as temples of gay vice, and tried to cultivate the more frivolous of his male acquaintance, and even went so far as to put in an appearance at a night club — and was more profoundly bored than ever. One evening he laid himself out conscientiously to get drunk. This was not a success; it ended in a bilious attack and a long distaste for whisky. Another time he sat down to play "chimmy" with the most inveterate gamblers he knew. Beginner's luck helped him at first to win five pounds, which didn't excite him; then he lost twenty, and was disproportionately annoyed. Nature had not cut out Denis for a *roué*. He did not amuse himself or any one else. Even Bredon and the seaplane were better than this. He would have given up and gone back to them in despair, if he had not happened to fall in with Mrs. Byrne.

She was sitting in her car in a lonely lane at ten o'clock at night when he saw her first, weeping tears of rage because her chauffeur had sunk down, snoring drunk, and she could not stir him. Such things did happen to Mrs. Byrne. Denis came to the rescue; he ejected the chauffeur by the wayside, and took the lady home himself. She was very grateful, and invited him to dinner. It was a pleasant house, and one met amusing people — literary, artistic, a little out of the usual set which had bored Denis so desperately. He liked his pretty, feather-witted hostess, too, and she liked him; indeed, before long it was plain that she more than liked him. It was not plain to Denis, who remained virtuously stiff as a ramrod long after the clubs were betting on Byrne's chance of bringing off his divorce this time. Mrs. Byrne had fallen headlong in love, and she was incapable of discretion.

When at last the truth dawned on Denis, his first impulse was to bolt. But he did not allow himself to do so. He stayed on, deliberately exposing himself to temptation in the hope that it would tempt him. He found it a hard struggle to be wicked. So far, then, Lettice was right; he

had not yet committed himself. She was right, too, in thinking that the scene at Olympia would decide things one way or another. Denis believed himself to be quite indifferent to Dorothea; yet her face (he could not have said how) had given him the slight deciding push, and he returned to Mrs. Byrne with his mind made up.

The brook by which he stood, patched with silver by the young March moon, found its way between bronze-stemmed alders, past willows cloudy in pollen-yellow, under banks where the kingcups spread their nosegays of burnished green and gold. Violets, invisible but sweet, clustered at the root of every rose. The scene was set for lovers, and Denis had been making love. Did he do it well? It might have been worse. There had been opposition to overcome, unexpected, stimulating: Evey Byrne with a conscience, forsooth! Denis had tasted the first-fruits of pleasure in crushing down her scruples and making her own she loved him. He had wrung out the confession without mercy. She tried to hold him off with her weak little hands against his breast.

"Ah, but ye don't truly love me, Denis!"

"Don't I?" said Denis, kissing her fawn-soft eyes and sweet, half-reluctant lips.

"Ah, but 'tis so wicked! God'll never forgive us!"

"There is no God that counts," Denis answered. He kissed her again. He had no idea that in his heart he was kissing Dorothea.

That was ten minutes ago. Was it time yet? Hardly, he decided; he might allow himself to finish his cigar. Alas! out of her presence the blaze had all too quickly died down. Mrs. Byrne was sweet, but she bored him like everything else. Still, he would go to her; yes, he would certainly go in a minute. It was his duty to see the thing through. (*Naturam expellas furca* — it seemed that Denis could not get away from that word!)

What a fool he was! Who would believe that he had reached his present age in his present state of innocence? He hoped Mrs. Byrne hadn't found it out, but he was rather afraid she had. If Denis had been honest with himself he

would have had to admit that one reason why he lingered here by the river, instead of seeking the welcome that awaited him, was that he was shy. Too ignominious, that; he shuffled away from the thought. He was dissatisfied with himself all round. Why couldn't he behave like other men? In the old days at Bredon how gloriously happy he had been, with the delicate engine of his brain working at full pressure, solving problems faster than his pencil could write them down! Now, it seemed, he could neither play nor work. What was it he had been sticking over, that last evening before he went to Westby? The everlasting difficulty, speed *versus* safety. There had been one or two rather clever things in the show to-day. The Sturt bus, that used I-struts, as he had meant to do; but the chord of the wings was too large, the stresses would be impossibly high. Why on earth couldn't Sturt see —

Who can tell whence ideas come? Inter-stellar drift? Some beam from the eternal verities shone suddenly in Denis's brain. He pulled out an old envelope and began covering it with rapid calculations. Ten minutes later, when he next looked up, there was scarcely room for another figure. He had come to a halt; he could go no further without referring to his old work. What time was it? He peered at his watch in the moonlight. Half-past ten: if he got up to town to-night, and slept at the Grosvenor, he could catch the five-forty down and be at Bredon in time for breakfast. He thrust the sheet of calculations into his pocket, and, with about one-twentieth of his mind upon the scene, started for the house. Coming in sight of its lighted windows, however, he slackened and stopped. Mrs. Byrne. There was not much sense left in his head, but it had occurred to him that his errand might be awkward to explain in person.

Denis never had been, or would be, afflicted with self-consciousness. He turned back from the lawn, skulked like a burglar through shrubberies and behind trees, and climbed in at the window of the room where they had dined. Still without a thought of false shame, he sat down at Mrs.

Byrne's own writing-table, and wrote with Mrs. Byrne's own pen, on her own paper. Another man might have found some difficulty in putting into words what he had to say; to Denis it seemed quite simple.

"MY DEAREST EVEY,— I was standing on your bridge just now, thinking of nothing else likely, when suddenly an idea flashed into my head which settles a problem that has worried me for years. If it works out as it should, it will make a revolution in aircraft design. There's been nothing like it since the Wrights. So I shall have to get straight back into harness. You'll forgive me, I know." Here he paused, and debated whether to quote, "I could not love thee, dear, so much," but decided against it. Mrs. Byrne was not literary. "One has to put the big things first, hasn't one? And after all, this hits me even harder than it hits you." Denis was pleased with this phrase. "If all goes well, I will come back and make my apologies in person. I am not waiting now, because I am afraid if I saw you I might not go." He was even better pleased with this. A satisfied smile overspread his face as he signed himself, "Devotedly yours," a form which he had never used before, and which took him some time to excogitate. Then he rang the bell, gave the note to a servant, and took himself off — again by the window.

"Make my apologies in person." Denis, it will be seen, was not repentant. He returned, as he had promised, a week later, prepared to pick up the thread of his adventure and do his duty to its boring end. He was surprised — surprised and aggrieved — to learn that Mrs. Byrne was not at home. "But she was expectin' me!" he said, quite indignant, to the model of decorum who stood guardian at the gate.

"Yes, sir. She asked me to give you this note," said the model without moving an eyelid. But he scanned Denis's face very inquisitively as he tore open the paper and read:

"Denis darling, this is God. I tried to steal you away from Him, but He won't let me have you. I knew all the

time how wrong it was. It has all been my fault. I am going where I can pray for you and pray to be forgiven. Oh! don't be angry with me, and don't let *her* be angry with me. I have been very wicked, but I did love you so.

“EVEY.”

The decorous Morris, who read this note (for of course Mrs. Byrne had omitted to seal it), got little by his scrutiny. The visitor did not stamp, nor swear, nor turn red, nor pale; he read through his dismissal with a very singular expression of gravity, turned away, came back absently to slip a tip into the man's hand, and finally strode off down the drive, carrying his handsome head, as poor Camille said of his enemy, like the *saint sacrament*, his dark blue Irish eyes fixed on far distant horizons.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FIRST ROUND

Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.—
PROVERBS.

SEVEN years of prison doctoring had not blunted the first fine temper of Leonard Scott's sympathy. Doctors in general, even in ordinary practice, have to harden themselves or break down; Scott stuck to his work year after year, and yet contrived to remain as tender-hearted as a novice at his first death-bed. He was steeped in that fount of love and strength, romance and poetry, known as the Catholic faith. Not the Roman Catholic faith, be it observed. Nothing annoyed him more than to be called a papist — except to be called a Protestant.

He was a dreamer, a saint, a mystic, this dapper little man with the snappy manner and the aggressively white linen; a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, whose ports of pearl and streets of shining gold were more real to him than the walls of Westby Jail. Saints and martyrs crowded heaven to applaud his progress; warrior angels fought at his right hand; Christ himself stooped to him in the mystery of the Eucharist. In this faith he was able to go on working hopelessly at his hopeless task — for what, after all, was the use of patching up these wretched bodies which in a few weeks must go back to the dirt and the vices that had bred their disease? Leonard Scott thought it was a great deal of use; he loved his criminals. The sociologist would have seen Westby Jail as a garbage heap meet for the furnace; the Christian idealist went about joyfully picking up pearls.

But a faith which removes mountains may fail to console the man who has to appear in knickerbockers at a dinner-party; and this child of heaven was made very uncomfortable

by the addition of Gardiner to his happy family of jail-birds. He hated attending as prison doctor on the man whom his evidence had helped to convict, and he did not like Gardiner himself. He thought him flippant, a quality which arises punctually to answer expectation. Since he did not like him, he felt he ought to cultivate him; your man of conscience always feels his duty to be the thing he doesn't want to do. In this case, however, Scott fell short of his duty. He carefully avoided Gardiner, and was rather annoyed to find that Gardiner seemed equally anxious to avoid him. Never did he bother his doctor for pills and potions. Yet Scott, who kept an uneasy eye upon his embarrassing patient, could see that prison life was not agreeing with his health.

One day he overheard two warders comparing notes about B14. He had been getting into hot water; he had smashed everything in his cell, and finished up by smashing a warder. "My word! he did give us ginger. You never see anything like it!" said Warder Barnes, with a touch of surprised admiration. "It's what I always *'ave* said — them quiet, ed-dicated ones gives twice as much trouble as the others when they do give trouble," assented Warder Mason. B14 was now in the punishment cells on a chastening diet of bread and water. Scott felt more than ever that he ought to find some pretext for seeing him, but he didn't do so.

Going back to prison after his trial seemed to Gardiner like entering the black mouth of a tunnel. There were the unescapable walls on either side, and the weight of a mountain overhead, the horror of panic pressing up behind, and the interminable stretch of black blank darkness through which he must grope before he could hope to see, far off, the first faint whiteness of deliverance. Yet the first days were not so bad as he had expected. Some of the outer light lingered on for a time; Lettice's face — she had not looked at him while giving her evidence, but at the end, just as she was leaving the box, she had turned deliberately and smiled at him across the court. That look went with him far into the darkness. It was the nights that were the worst.

There were moments, then, when he had to hold off panic by the throat. But he was carefully prudent; he worked with all his might during the eight hours he was at work, and studied with all his might during the sixteen he spent in his cell. That was his last charge to his brother: "You send along some books to the prison library. Grammars and texts — I want to learn Flemish and Dutch, and I could do with some Portugoosh as well. I'm getting a bit rusty, and they all come in handy." On these terms he found himself actually better off as a convicted criminal than he had been as a prisoner on remand. Regular work and exercise were by no means a bad exchange, even for the high privileges of wearing his own clothes and paying for his own dinner.

March came in with balmy days of relaxing sweetness. The sun at dawn stole into his cell through the ground glass of his window; and by standing on his stool, with his nose pressed as close to the ventilator as it would go, he could even at times smell violets. Persistent little friendly flowers, they had found their way into the prison yard and nched themselves between the stones of the wall; and in March every tiny seedling was a knot of blue.

"When the moon their hollows lights,
And they are filled with balms of spring,
And in the glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing —
Ah! then a longing like despair
Is to their inmost caverns sent."

Gardiner had lived all his life too close to nature to escape the call of the spring. If his work had been out of doors, in the garden or the farm, he might have come through better; but he was in the printing room; always hot and stuffy with glue, and his exercise was limited to the five minutes' walk to and fro. He lost his sleep, and in the long vigils he was tormented by visions of Rochehaut. He saw the great solemn autumnal hills, fallow in the moonlight, the leafless woods, the white crags matted with ivy and with the rusty growth of ferns, the Semois in flood, chrome-yellow, surging from side to side of her naked valley. He

remembered the large cool rooms of his home, the green light filtering through the jalousies, the white cloth blowing round the legs of the little table under the pines where he took his meals, the sound and smell of the coffee machine, the summer apples which he gathered in the orchard, "faintly red even beneath the crimson skin." Like many southerners, Gardiner lived very largely on fruit; and one of the minor trials of his prison life was the prison diet, where fruit and vegetables are not. Most prisoners suffer from this; he suffered more than most, and could less afford the steady lowering of his health.

It happened one day, owing to some alterations, that Gardiner had to change his cell, and was put into the older part of the prison. His new quarters were so dark that the occupant was regularly allowed a light in the daytime. The warder in charge was too busy to see to it at the moment; next day he promised to do so, but forgot, the prisoner meanwhile being left to twiddle his thumbs during the sixteen empty hours he spent each day in his cell. When, for the third time, he put forward his submissive request, Warder Thomson, a surly fellow, happened to be out of temper, and told him curtly not to bother. To his amazement the well-conducted B14 flew at him like a fury. He slipped out just in time, and blew his whistle for help. B14 meanwhile amused himself by smashing everything smashable in his cell; he kicked his tins into cocked hats, he rent his bedclothes to ribbons, he tore his books out of their bindings and strewed them about the floor. It was a glorious smash, and it was followed by an even more glorious fight; for directly the door opened he flew again upon the offending Warder Thomson with the leg of his dismembered stool, and succeeded in breaking his head and knocking out two of his teeth, before he in his turn was "coshed" by an assistant, and finally brought to earth. For the space of ten exciting minutes Gardiner enjoyed himself.

But afterwards, when he came to himself in the dismal "solitary" cell, and still more when he heard his punishment, and knew that he had cut himself off for two endless

months from his friends — then the cold reaction set in, and he went down into the depths. The first night was terrible. Panic was again at his throat; it did not succeed in pulling him down, but when the dawn came, and at the cheerful sounds of human life the furies shrank back into their shades, he knew that he had been very near — something. What he feared he did not know, but he did know that if his fear got the mastery, if he lost his self-command, he would not be fit to go to Lettice at the end of his term.

He lay thinking very earnestly, open-eyed. It was perfectly plain what he ought to do: he ought to put down his name to see the doctor, who would give him bromide or something to settle his nerves. And there was more in it than that; he ought to see Scott about another small trouble which had nothing to do with nerves, and which, if he had chosen to put it forward, would have been a mitigating circumstance in the mind of the Governor when he pronounced sentence. Oh, he was a fool — he really was a fool! Why, if he had even chosen to state his grievance about the light he might have got off with quarter penalty, perhaps with none at all. Captain Harding wasn't half a bad old chap, he made allowances for human nature, even in a criminal. But would Gardiner do that? Not he! He had stood sullenly dumb, refusing to defend himself, refusing to answer a single question. It went against the grain with him to explain, to make excuses, even to admit that he was ill. Yet could he stand another night like the last? He would have preferred to; he would have butted his obstinate head into death or even madness, sooner than bend his pride. But there was Lettice to be considered, and all her little fads about standing up to things and not running away.

When Warder Barnes came in the evening to bring his supper of bread and water and collect the mail-bags which he should have sewn (prisoners in the punishment cells do not go out to work), he found the pile untouched. Gardiner had not done one. Barnes pursed up his lips to a whistle.

"Hullo, hullo! now this ain't sense, B14. Why ain't you done your work to-day?"

"Because I haven't," said the prisoner. He was sitting on his stool with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands; he reached out for the water Barnes had brought and drank it at a draught, but otherwise he did not stir.

"That's silly talk," said the warder reprovingly. It was the same little Cockney who had admired what he called B14's ginger; a kindly little soul, as many of the prison attendants are. "You're only makin' trouble for yourself. Ain't you had enough already?" The prisoner made no sign. "Come now! You give me your word as you'll do your job to-morrow, and I'll pass you light this time. Don't want another week of it in 'ere, do you?" Still no answer. "Oh, well, I can't wait all night, if you choose to be refractory you must," said Barnes, rather short, because his kindness had met with no response. He gathered up the untouched bags. "I shall 'ave to report you, that's all."

He was just going out of the door when the prisoner moved.

"I say."

"Well?"

"I couldn't do those bags," said Gardiner. "My hand's bad."

"Your hand bad! What's the matter with it?"

Barnes snatched roughly at the half-extended fingers. They were torn out of his grasp. "Damn you," said Gardiner very quietly. Even in the darkness Barnes could see his face, scarlet with sudden pain.

"I didn't mean to 'urt you," he said gruffly. "I thought you was malingering. What have you done to your 'and?"

"I don't malingering, and I haven't done anything to my hand," the prisoner retorted. His tone was short; he was still nursing his wrist and biting his lip. "But the fact remains, I can't sew. If you wouldn't mind putting me down to see the doctor, I should be much obliged. There's my ticket."

"Let's 'ave a look." Gardiner would rather have put his fist, pain and all, into the man's face; he silently extended his palm. "My word! that gives you pen and ink, I lay,"

said Barnes with critical interest. "I say, I'm sorry I hurt you, B14; I might 'a' known you wasn't one of the 'umbugin' sort. I'll put you down to see the doctor, never fear."

The door banged with the complacent decision of prison doors, and Gardiner was alone. He paid for his susceptibility to pleasure by a corresponding susceptibility to pain; Barnes had actually made him feel faint. He tumbled off his stool on to the floor and leaned against the wall, closing his eyes. Well! he was in for it now. Would he be able to keep up the same virtuous docility in his interview with Scott? Lord only knew! And, thinking of Lettice, he smiled. It was she who had dictated every word.

Barnes, good little soul, was pricked with compunction for his roughness. Partly on this account, and partly because, even to his unprofessional eye, B14's hand appeared to be in a bad way, he made it his business to go to Dr. Scott as soon as he could; and Scott was equally prompt in responding. The rule for the casual sick is that they are collected in a batch from the gangs after the "cease work" bell in the morning, and shepherded to the doctor's office, where he disposes of them in turn: summary jurisdiction, a "tot" of No. Dash medicine, to be swallowed on the spot. B14, however, being in punishment, could not go to Mahomet, so Mahomet had to go to him. Half-an-hour after it had closed, Gardiner's door reopened to admit the doctor, with Barnes in attendance. A doctor never, in any circumstances, sees a prisoner alone.

Gardiner, nodding off into an uneasy doze, scrambled to his feet in a hurry.

"You wanted to see me?" said Scott in his curtest tone, because he was mortally sorry for his patient. "Got a bad hand, have you? Let's have a look."

"There wasn't any hurry, sir. I didn't want to bother you —"

"It's my business to come when I'm called, isn't it? I'm here to doctor the lot of you, aren't I? You do as you're told."

With that Scott plumped down on the stool, and took

the hand in his own. His touch was exquisitely gentle. Gardiner rather wished he had grabbed at him like Warder Barnes; but he stood submissive, and submissively answered questions. "Yes, sir, I got it rather badly crushed last summer. Yes, it did take a time to heal. No, I don't know that I felt anything particular until this began — that was about ten days ago."

"Hurt, eh?" asked Scott, with a swift glance up from his dressing.

"A little," Gardiner admitted.

"Suppuration of the palm is the very —" said Scott. "Don't you try to humbug me. I know. Damaged the bone, that's what you've done, and you aren't by any means out of the wood yet. That'll do for to-night. Now let's have a look at you. Your general health can't be up to much, or you wouldn't have a mess-up like this. Any special symptoms to complain of?"

"I've been rather off my sleep lately."

"You'd need cast-iron nerves to be on it, with your hand in that state. How long has it been going on — the insomnia, I mean?"

"Oh, three weeks or so. Since the warm weather set in."

"Before your hand was bad, eh?"

"I suppose so."

"And the hand itself went wrong before you indulged in the pretty little scrap that's landed you in this pestilential hole?" said Scott. It was not a speech he ought to have made to a prisoner; but Scott was far from always saying what he ought. Besides, he had had a long battle with the authorities about the condition of the old part of the prison in general and of the punishment cells in particular, a battle in which he had been worsted, and which had left a rankling grudge. The Governor had called him a meddlesome sentimentalist, which was true; and he had called the Governor a pig-headed martinet, which was about equally true.

Gardiner assented with a nod. It was all against the grain, every word that he said, and every drop of the suppressed sympathy which he detected lurking under the little doctor's

extra aggressive manner. Nevertheless with another heroic effort, backed by another thought of Lettice, he constrained himself to add: "I think perhaps it's the indoor life, sir. I've been used to be out all day and all night. Here I'm in the printing shop; it's an interesting job, and I like it, but I think perhaps I might get on better on the farm."

"You do, do you? What do you suppose you know about it?"

"Nothing," said Gardiner, "only you asked me."

"H'm!" said the little doctor. "Well, I can't do anything more now. I'll see to you properly to-morrow." He picked himself up with his usual fierce alacrity. Going out of the door, he turned to add: "I'll send you round a dose in half-an-hour. Warder, you see he takes it. Young fool, going on for a month till he gets into this state—he'll throw it into the slops, if you give him half a chance!"

With that, exit Dr. Scott, still grumbling.

Gardiner threw himself down on his bare plank bed. "O Lord!" he said with half a chuckle and half a groan. "Oh, Lettice, it's a pity you weren't the fly on the wall, I think you'd have enjoyed the scene. Lord, how I do hate that little chap! and yet I don't, you know, I rather like him. I wish he'd prescribe me a cigarette, I bet that would put me to by-by better than all his boluses. I'm glad I said what I did about the farm. If he can only work that, I think, with luck, I may pull through. He's gone away breathing out mercies and indulgences. What an ass I am to dislike saying these things, but I certainly do. Oh, Lettice, *mi prenda, alma de mi vida, luz de mis ojos*—won't I make love to you in Spanish when my time comes, and won't you be not ductile!—if I do stick it out you ought to feel uncommonly proud of yourself, but you won't. Never, never in my life shall I succeed in persuading you that it's all your doing, but it is."

CHAPTER XXV

I SENT A LETTER TO MY LOVE

Savage I was sitting in my house, late, lone:
Dreary, weary with the long day's work:
Head of me, heart of me, stupid as a stone;
Tongue-tied now, now blaspheming like a Turk;
When, in a moment, just a knock, call, cry,
Half a pang and all a rapture, there again were we! —
"What, and is it really you again?" quoth I.
"I again, what else did you expect?" quoth She.

The Householder.

THE gas was not carried up to the attics of No. 22 Canning Street. Late-comers had to stumble in the dark up the last flight of stairs, and bark their shins over the brooms and pails which Beatrice invariably left standing about on the landing. One evening in April Lettice was sitting at work, brow buried in her hands, tensely courting the Muse, when she was startled by a sudden tremendous clatter. The door burst open and Denis fell into the room, in company with a mop and a banister brush.

"Dear, dear!" said Lettice with her usual inadequacy.

"I wish you'd not keep an ironmonger's shop on your landing," said Denis, annoyed, and rubbing his knee.

"You, you — you are so *violent*!" Lettice protested in her pianissimo drawl. She went outside for a moment. "There, I've put them all away in the cupboard, so you won't have to break your poor nose when you go home," she consoled him. "Now, how nice it is to see you again! And what have you been doing with yourself all this long time?"

"Selling four monoplanes to the War Office," said Denis, with the simple satisfaction of bygone days. "What do you think of that?"

"No! have you really?"

"A man I used to know in the Sappers came over to

Dent-de-lion and fixed up the order last Saturday. It's been in the air for some time, but of course I couldn't say anything till it was settled. Wandesforde's awful pleased. It's no end of a leg-up for us."

"Four all at once!" cooed his sympathetic hostess.

"Yes, the Government's rather keen on the Air Service these days. There's a lot goin' on we don't hear anything about — a lot; and they don't mean to be caught napping."

"Did your friend tell you that?" asked Lettice, interested, as always, in politics.

Denis nodded. "He did. And more. He was askin' me, among other things, what percentage of our civilian flyers would volunteer in case of a war."

"Oh! What did you say?"

"I said all, of course — every man jack of 'em who wasn't needed as an instructor at home."

"You'd go yourself?"

"Rather so! What do you take me for? I should join up with the R.F.C. at once. Oh, it's coming, and they know it's coming; that's been obvious ever since Agadir. The only question is, when. I hope I shan't smash myself first. I'd be sorry to be out of the fun."

He lapsed into silence, leaning back in the big chair which Lettice kept on purpose for him, his long legs extended half across the hearth. How many months was it since he had last filled that place? Lettice had not so much as seen him since the Olympia day; but neither by word nor look did she remind him of the gap. She was an adept at taking things for granted. It was enough to see him sitting there, the same old Denis, talking in the same old way. And yet, not quite the same. Even in his silence there was a new quality. He had matured; he had lived through the wreck of an ideal, and built up his faith again, steady and sure, upon a rock.

Lettice put away her papers with delicate neatness, and sat down in a low chair with her needlework — not a green dragon this time, but a pair of combinations, which she darned serenely under the masculine eye. Denis had a nice

mind, he would never see. Now if it had been a certain other person — Lettice made a graceful figure, soft brown hair and hazel eyes, long throat and little head, slight drooping shoulders and slim waist, set off by the soft gray-blue silk of her dress. She was fond of that peculiarly soft and feminine fabric known to dressmakers as *crêpe de Chine*. She could not spend much on her clothes, but she chose and wore them with that French fineness and perfection of detail which she, in common with her sisters, had learned from their foreign upbringing.

"Well, I didn't come here to talk about German invasions," said Denis, rousing himself. "The fact is, I'm rather badly worried about Gardiner, Lettice. I didn't like that last piece of news at all. Did you?"

"You've not heard anything fresh?" asked Lettice quickly, her work dropping in her lap.

"Not a syllable; and can't till June. That's the worst of it; it's such a deadly long time. I'd half thought of running down there and lookin' up little Scott — he's quite a decent little chap, and he'd know. But I suppose it wouldn't do."

"I suppose not," agreed Lettice, who was, as has been said, a dandy in affairs of honor. She made her funny little pause to collect words before she got rid of her next speech. "I suppose if it had gone any further we should have heard by now."

"Heard?"

"The prison people would have let us know."

"Let us know what?"

"Why, if he'd been ill, or gone off his head, or anything of that sort."

"You think there's a danger of his going off his head?"

"Well, that's what you're talking about, isn't it?"

"No," said Denis, "I'd not got so far as that." He regarded her thoughtfully. "I wish you'd tell me how it strikes you, Lettice. I can't see my way at all."

"There's nothing to tell," said Lettice, a trifle restless at being asked to explain the obvious. "He must have

been off his balance to hit a warder, mustn't he? And when that begins, with anybody like him, you never know where it will stop. He isn't any too steady."

(Certainly there was no one like Lettice for pulling things off pedestals. Hitting a warder—it didn't sound nearly so bad as assaulting an officer!)

"Well, I've known Gardiner five and twenty years, and I'd never have called him unsteady. Hard as nails, more like."

"So he is that too."

"Now what on earth do you mean?"

"Well, of course he'd be hard so long as he hadn't anything to face he really minded, wouldn't he? And till this he didn't, did he? It's what you said yourself—he's always been lucky. But if you get him off his guard he's rather unusually sensitive. Look at the way he feels pain!"

"I never saw him feel pain. In my company he's always been brutally robust."

"Well, but can't you *tell* he would, by the set of his lips?"

"No," said Denis, "I can't. I've not your imagination."

To this Lettice made no reply, unless one might count the slight derisive lift of her chin. She never would take up the personal question. She would never, if she could help it, say: "I thought." She was sometimes driven to say, "I did," but even then she kept to the bald facts, uncolored by her personality. Denis, shifting in his chair to a more convenient angle, continued to regard her with attention, in which now mingled some amusement.

"Oh ah," he said, "you were there when he damaged his hand, weren't you? I'd forgotten. How long was it you stayed on at Roehault after I left?"

"About six weeks."

"And you were actin' as his secretary all that time?"

"Part of it."

"Of course that accounts."

"Accounts what *for*?" asked Lettice unwisely, with her little air of distraction.

"For the sympathetic insight you display," said Denis, now openly smiling. Lettice had chaffed him all her life; it was a new thing for him to turn the tables. "He swears it was you sent him back, and I believe him now. You've eased my mind quite a lot. He won't go under. He may knock out a warder or so, but he'll come through all right in the end — with such backin'!"

"Rubbish," said Lettice with acerb decision. She folded her work, got up, lighted a small paraffin lamp and carried it outside. Denis watched her hang it on the wall above the stairs.

"Is that a gentle hint to me to be off?" he asked, still smiling, as she reëntered. "Because if so I'm not takin' any. I'll go when my time comes, but there's ten minutes yet."

"It's not for you at all, it's for Dot O'Connor."

"For Dot O'Connor!"

"She always tumbles over the brooms worse than you did," Lettice explained, "so I give her a light on the stairs when I'm expecting her to supper. I'd have given you one, too, if I'd known you were coming."

She had banished Denis's smile. He shifted in his chair once more, but this time away from her. "Dot O'Connor!" he repeated for the third time, in that altered voice. "Do you mean Mrs. Trent?"

"She doesn't like being called that now."

"Do you see much of her?"

"So so," said Lettice. She had mentioned Dorothea, not to get away from Denis's chaff — that would have been too cruel — but of set purpose, because there was something she had to say before he went. "Will you stay and have supper with us? I *think* there'll be enough to go round, if you aren't too hungry."

"No, Lettice."

"I don't see why you shouldn't."

"Don't you?"

His tone was not encouraging, but it made not a pin's difference to Lettice; her difficulties came always from within,

not from without, and once she had made up her mind to speak all the king's horses and all the king's men would not have stopped her. She did not imagine that she could move Denis, but there were certain things he ought to know, and which, in justice to Dorothea, she meant to set before him. They would not move him now, but he would not forget them; and in time to come they might sink in and soften his judgment.

"I don't see why you shouldn't forgive her," she pronounced.

"I'd rather not discuss it."

"Very well, don't you say anything, but will you listen?" Denis moved restlessly in his chair. "You're too hard on her," said Lettice, hitting straight and hard. "You will treat her as a woman, when she's only a child. And you don't realize what marrying a — a beast like that does to a girl. It bruises her innocence. It's like tearing open the eyes of a blind kitten. You can't expect her to see right and wrong like other people." So far beyond herself had Lettice been carried by that potent loosener of tongues, a sense of injustice! She went on with the same resolute candor: "Besides, there's another thing. She loves you. And she can love; you won't meet what she has to give twice in a lifetime. I know" — Lettice spoke with an effort; it was as near to an avowal as she could go, and the fact that she thought her cause worth such a sacrifice added tenfold to the weight of her words — "I know she's often made me ashamed of my stockishness. Are you prepared to throw all that away?"

She had finished, and she stopped. Denis sat silent, staring into the fire and pulling absently at his forelock, a trick he had when deep in thought. The soft sounds of Lettice's business did not break the stillness of the room. The alarm clock which Denis had given her to get up by in the morning (Lettice had long been mortally afraid of the alarm, and she still handled it as gingerly as if she expected it to explode) ticked on through the stillness. It struck seven; Denis glanced at his watch, and got up.

"I must go," he said confusedly. "I — I'd no idea it was so late."

He took his hat and stick, and Lettice thought he was really going then and there, without another word; but he thought better of it, and from the landing came back and stood in the doorway, visibly struggling with himself. "You — you mustn't think I mind what you said, Lettice," he got out. "I'd always listen to you. But I can't do this — I can't —"

Lettice looked him in the face. "She would have something to forgive you now," she said deliberately.

"No, she would not," said Denis with equal deliberation; and he met her eyes, fair and square. "But that's not anything to do with it. It's not a question of forgiveness. It's — I — oh, I *can't* do it, Lettice — I can't explain —"

"Well —" said Lettice, summing up with that sad, vague word which looks back, unsatisfied, over the past, and forward, unhopeful, towards the future. And that was all she learned, then or for many months to come, of Denis's feelings for Dorothea, of his wanderings in the wilderness, of the manner of his deliverance. Not till many months later, in alien scenes, in unimaginable circumstances, in a different world, did he reopen that subject.

He straightened himself, glancing again at his watch. "I really must go. I'm dinin' with the Wandesfordes, to celebrate, and I'll never hear the last of it if I'm late. Wandesforde always thinks he can do the funny dog about Irish people — silly ass. Wish you were coming too."

"Me?" asked Lettice, opening her eyes.

"You. It's not much fun sittin' here alone and thinkin' about things — is it?" said Denis; and to her wide amazement he put a brotherly arm round her and kissed her cheek. Lettice turned slowly and deeply pink; not on account of the kiss, however. She took her lamp and stood torch-bearer to light him down the stairs. When the quick military tread had reached the lower landing she was turning back to her room, but a quick scuffle in the cupboard and a breathless voice stopped her.

"Lettice — wait!"

And Dorothea scrambled out from among the brooms and brushes, bringing a shower of them with her. "Oh, bother!" said she, turning to stuff them back unceremoniously, and precipitating a fresh avalanche. Lettice found her voice again.

"You — you've got a black on your nose," she remarked originally.

"So would any one have, in this horrid little hole! I'd just reached the landing when your door opened, and I bundled straight in here, and all the things fell every which way, and I had to clutch them up in both hands all the time. I made sure you'd hear."

"I did," said Lettice, "but I thought it was Black Maria."

"Well, I'd *be* Black Maria if I could, I know you'd like me better," retorted Dorothea, expending the last of her temper in a spiteful kick at a pail, and slamming the door before more disasters could happen. "But oh, Lettice, oh, Lettice, isn't it glorious news?"

"You heard what we were saying?"

"Well, of course. How could I help it? You can't put your fingers in your ears when you're holding up six brooms and a mop. I heard every word. And I don't care! I don't care a scrap! Oh, I am so glad!"

"Glad?" Lettice repeated. She had not known quite what to expect; certainly not this. How the child's eyes were sparkling!

"Well, of course!" she cried. "Didn't *you* hear? Didn't you see what he was like? Oh! now I know that's all right I don't care about anything else — I don't care *what* happens, so long as that doesn't!"

She flung herself down on the rug with a tempestuous sigh, and tried to dry her eyes on a wisp of lace. That proving inadequate, she rummaged through half a dozen pockets and dragged out a dingy red square which had evidently been used as an oil rag. She held it out by the corners. "Oh dear, I must have stolen Turner's — oh dear, I wish I could manage to hit something between a doily

and a duster — never mind, a hanky's a hanky," said she, and blew her nose and dried her tears forthwith. Then, looking up sharply, "Lettice! why don't you say something? Aren't you pleased too?"

"O-oh, oh yes," said Lettice hastily; "only you see I'd had time to get over it before you came."

"I shan't get over it — I shan't ever get over it," murmured Dorothea, nestling round to gaze into the fire. "You don't know how awful it's been to feel *that* on me. I'd rather I killed him than see that woman — Do you know, Lettice, I do think there must be a God after all. I didn't ever use to, but ever since that Olympia day I've been praying, oh! so hard, that He'd save Denis — I didn't see how even God could stop him then, but there wasn't anything else I could do, and I just had to do something. And now you see he has. He didn't tell you anything about how it happened?" Lettice shook her head. "Oh, well, that doesn't really matter, it's his being saved that counts," said Dorothea, relapsing again into one of her boneless attitudes, and smiling rosily over clasped hands into the fire.

"Did you hear —" began Lettice.

"What he said about me? Oh yes. Well, of course I'd love to have him forgive me, but I know he couldn't possibly, and anyway I don't matter about," said Dorothea, her voice softened into dreams. "It's him — it's him. It does mean such a lot, Lettice! It isn't only that he is what he used to be, what I thought he never could be again; it's ever so much more than that. Denis wasn't made to think of women as he thought of — of me and Mrs. Byrne. He was made to marry, Lettice. Can't you see how perfectly sweet he'd be to his wife? — yes, and to his boys and girls too; how he'd love them (I expect he'd have a pet little girl, and call her Letty), and how they'd all adore him? He's one of those men who — who only truly *mellow* in their own homes. If he could only find some nice girl who'll love him — no, not better than me, nobody ever could do that, but well enough to make up to him for the horrid little wretch I've been —

I wish you would, Lettice, but I'm afraid that's past praying for."

"Me?" said Lettice. "I don't think that would do."

"Why not?" demanded Dorothea. Lettice failing to reply at once, she whisked round suddenly, with an eel-like twist. "Why do you say it like that? Why aren't you gladder? Is there anything wrong? There is, there is! Oh, Lettice, what is it?"

She was kneeling up now, and had seized Lettice's hands. "You're making me spill the milk, and I can't get *any* more," Lettice warned her; but she was not to be diverted. "You've been worried for ages, only I've been such a blind donkey thinking of Denis I haven't noticed," she cried. "Why did he say you oughtn't to be let sit alone and think? What did he mean? Lettice — oh, Lettice! is it about Mr. Gardiner? Have you any bad news? Oh, don't, don't tell me I've done that too!"

Lettice freed herself summarily. Dorothea had room in her little head for but one idea at a time, and therefore was apt to overlook what lay under her little nose; but, her attention once aroused, she was keen on a scent, and her intuition, the prerogative of semi-civilized minds, had a way of landing her dead on the truth. Now there were certain things which Denis might be permitted to see, but which Dorothea might not — no! not on any account.

"There isn't any news at all, if you want to know," she said. "He hit a warder, so all his letters and things have been stopped off."

"But isn't Denis going to visit him quite soon?"

"That's stopped too."

"Oh!" said Dorothea blankly, "oh dear! I see."

She did see, only too plainly. Oh, what a little donkey she had been! But who would ever have imagined that Lettice — and with Mr. Gardiner, of all people! oh, how could she? She did, though, no doubt about that, and with Lettice that would mean a dreadfully big thing, the whole of her life, and — oh, good gracious! how she would simply hate to have

any one know! Oh, she mustn't, she mustn't be allowed to guess! All this passed through Dorothea's mind in the space of half-a-second, and under the stimulus of that last thought she pulled herself round, with a mighty effort, to ask as innocently as she could: "Did — did Denis know about this the day of the show?"

"He'd just heard."

"Oh," said Dorothea, "oh, I wonder he didn't strike me to the ground! Oh, how wicked, how wicked I've been!"

There was nothing visible but the red handkerchief. Lettice looked at her sharply; but the pose was so natural, and any pose seemed so foreign to Dorothea, and Lettice so much wanted to be taken in, that she was. Not wholly; but she stuck her head in the sand and refused to see her own doubts. And behind the red handkerchief Dorothea, too much overwhelmed to cry, sat among the ruins which she had pulled down on her own head and wondered helplessly when she *would* see the end of all the harm she had done. "I was so happy about Denis, and now there's this!" Her love for Denis had been a sort of sublimated selfishness, but now she was thinking about other people — about Lettice, yes, and about Gardiner, though there she was all at sea. "I don't know what I've done to him, but it must be something very bad for Lettice to be like this!" she reflected. "But, oh dear! after all, what should I feel like if it were Denis in prison? And what would he feel like himself? And Mr. Gardiner's led such a free sort of out-of-doors life —"

In the depths below a bell rang; Beatrice's feet pounded up from the basement. They came on from flight to flight, up the bare boards to the attics, and ended with a single bang on the door. "Miss Lettus, 's a letter for you!" Lettice went with her soft, unhurried step to take it in. She carried it to the lamp, and stood arrested, staring at the envelope.

Dorothea was sitting up, her dark hair tumbling about her eyes. "Oh, Lettice, what is it?"

"From the prison," said Lettice, opening the envelope and drawing out the enclosure with a steady hand. From across

the room Dorothea could see that it was not in Gardiner's handwriting; and then she saw Lettice's face change, and her heart turned over in her breast.

"Lettice —!"

"What?" said Lettice, absorbed. "O-oh no, it's all right; it's only that he — he's hurt his hand —"

Dorothea turned her face to the wall and said her prayers. This was the letter which Lettice received:

DEAR MISS SMITH,—I have permission to write you a short note on business.

I am anxious about my hotel. It has been in the hands of a caretaker all winter; but for the summer season I had arranged for my housekeeper to come back, and most of the servants. The housekeeper is a trustworthy person, and quite competent to run the place herself; but I can't very well give her *carte blanche* with my banking account, and I'm sure she wouldn't accept it if I did. What I want is somebody to sign checks, manage the correspondence, and act as figurehead. Practically what you did last year. Will you take it on again? I should have every confidence in you, and of course it is your proper place. As far as I know at present, I propose, if it suits you, to be married as soon as I leave here in October, and go out to Rochehaut for the winter. Please let me know if this fits in with your views.

I must apologize for my writing, but I have been laid up in hospital with a touch of the old trouble in my hand. When I come out, I believe I am to go on the farm. The governor has most kindly remitted the rest of my punishment, and I shall be allowed to see a visitor next month as usual. Will you let Merion-Smith know, if you are writing to him?

Sincerely,

H. C. GARDINER.

Dorothea at first had turned her eyes scrupulously away; but they were back now, and searching Lettice's face for news. That face wore a decidedly queer and pensive look. She refolded the letter with careful exactness.

"Well? What does he say?"

"O-oh, he wants me to go out to Rochehaut and look after his old hotel."

"Then he's all right? He isn't ill or anything? Denis won't have to be anxious any more?"

"He's in hospital, but it's nothing much." Lettice read out what Gardiner said about his hand, and the description of her duties as well. But she did not read those sentences of barefaced impudence which transformed an apparently decorous business communication into a proposal of marriage. Dorothea drew a long breath.

"And you'll do it, Lettice? You'll go? Oh! *may* I come too? I won't be intense, truly I won't, and perhaps I might even help you a little—I would love to do something for Mr. Gardiner, to try and make up for all the harm I've done him! You are going yourself, anyhow, aren't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Lettice, with a long-suffering air.

This was in the month of April, 1914.

CHAPTER XXVI

"E"

Raise a chapel with forms in rows
Under the competent warders' eyes,
That day and night search out men's privacies.
God is too soft, but a warder knows
How to deal with the prisoners who kneel in rows.

Here shall you starve and shame and break,
Warming the cells and weighing the food,
And drawing up rules for the inmates' good;
Build in their souls with the rules you make;
Heap up the stones on the lives you break.

The Prison.

AUGUST, 1914, on the Semois.

How hot it was! The white walls of the farm, its squat white tower, its steep roofs of ink-blue slate, all stood out, crude as the painted scenery of a diorama, against the solid azure of the sky. It had been a fort, this farm, in the days when Belgium was the cockpit of Europe; but now golden straws protruded from the loopholes, and sparrows were flying out and in. The garden had its roses, the lattices their geraniums, and on the sill a sandy cat was curled up in a ball with her head tucked under, exposing a white furry throat to the sun. The tower had its fringe of chicory and trailing pink convolvulus. From it the meadow fell away, spongy and mossy-green, to a brook which tinkled in silver cascades down a crease between the hills. Beyond the stream the ground rose steeply, a stubble field flaxen in the sunshine, with its line of boundary elms and its peaceful scattered sheaves; on the sky-line a ragged little fir wood raised its head, dark spires against the blue. To the right the brook sank away, twisting round a corner out of sight, and the hills closed in, steep and wooded, upon this little nest of peace.

And yet — was it so peaceful? Look to the left. As elsewhere it fell away, so here the harvest field swelled up in a lint-white line, firm and pure, the edge of the visible world. In the pale turquoise above that line hung a cloud, a discoloration, spreading like an ink-drop in clear water. Where that cloud now hung, yesterday the village of Rochehaut had stood. Contented, squalid little place with its steaming middens, its perambulating pigs, its church squatting like a little white-and-gray cat beside its miry *place*! Or look across at the opposite hill. Above the firs another drift of smoke was diffusing in the radiant air. That was the direction of the Bellevue, the big new hotel which Madame Hasquin of the farm supplied with milk and eggs. Or look at the farm itself. The fowls were clucking and scratching in the yard, the cows were lowing at the gate, but Monsieur Hasquin did not come to drive them in to the milking, nor did little Denise bring her sieve full of golden peas for her pet fantails. The place was still and peaceful; but it was the stillness and the peace of death.

There are no daily papers in a prison, and no news from the outside world is supposed to reach the inmates. It filters in, nevertheless. Gardiner first heard of the falling of the great shadow from a laborer who had got six weeks at the Summer Assizes for beating his wife to a jelly. Out of his cups he was an amiable soul, ready to make friends with anybody; and Gardiner, who put on no airs, was ready to respond.

On leaving hospital, B14 had been put to work in the garden. His hand had still to be dressed every day, but by the doctor's orders he was sent into the open air to do such jobs as he could. One summer afternoon he was weeding the paths, and West, the wife-beater, was digging potatoes in the adjoining plot. Gardiner divined by his important looks that he had something to say, and contrived to linger long enough for West to catch him up.

"I say, matey," the wife-beater began, in that lip-whisper

by which prisoners communicate under the very noses of their guards, "'ave you heard there's a war on?"

"No! you don't say so! Who with? Mrs. Pankhurst?"

"It's Gawd's truth I'm telling—"

"Gammon! Somebody's been kiddin' you."

"Swelp me, they ain't then. I 'eard Old Ikey talkin' about it to Billy Blood."

Billy Blood was Warder Thomson, so named since Gardiner had knocked out his teeth; Old Ikey was Warder Barnes. His name happened to be Ian, but the initial was enough for the wit of the prison.

"Well, who are we fighting, anyway? Did you hear that?"

At this moment West discovered that Warder Thomson's eye was upon him, and he sheered off to the end of his row. It was some time before, cautiously regulating their progress, they managed to come together again. West discharged his whisper without preface.

"It's Rooshia," he announced. "Rooshia and France."

"Not so bad for a beginning. Who else?"

"Well, they did say somethin' about Injer—"

"Great uprising of the native races. End of the British Raj," said Gardiner with levity. "Let 'em all come! We're in for a giddy time, I don't think. What price the British army now?"

"Oh, of course if you ain't goin' to believe me—"

West had incautiously raised his voice, and authority was down on him in a moment—or rather on his companion. "Now then, B14, none o' that! Idlin' and mutterin'! I suppose you think this is a rest cure. You get on with your job, and put some beef into it, or I'll report you." And for the next ten minutes, till the "cease work" bell, while West dug potatoes diligently under the apple-trees, Billy Blood stood over B14 and counted every weed that dropped into his basket. Gardiner could have laughed in his face. For such petty pin-pricks as Warder Thomson's he cared—not a pin-prick. As Lettice had said, where he was not abnormally sensitive he was wholesomely callous.

He got no further chance of speaking to the amiable wife-beater, but that did not trouble him. Some cock-and-bull story the fellow had got hold of — he was crassly ignorant, and stupid as a hog. That evening, however, he had a visit from the chaplain. The elderly gentleman who had fallen a victim to Mr. Gardiner, and whom Mr. Gardiner's son commonly alluded to as "the old foozle," had resigned, and been succeeded by a new man of very different kidney. The Rev. and Hon. Noel Dalrymple-Roche was not more than thirty, very big, very massive, with ashen-fair hair, a regular profile, and a cold blue eye. He had been a Cambridge rowing Blue and sixth Wrangler; and to these mixed accomplishments he added a third — he possessed enough driving force to command an army corps. A misfit in his profession, thought Gardiner, summing him up with an amused eye the first time he read the service; and a double misfit as prison chaplain.

It was his first visit to Gardiner. He came in alone — the chaplain has that privilege. The prisoner was standing under the window, slanting his book to catch the feeble light.

"Reading?" asked Roche, stretching out his hand for the volume.

"Yes, sir. I'm very fond of a good book." Gardiner, ever imitative, had adapted his language to his surroundings. He could not, however, thus adapt his book, a small blue volume of the Colección Española Nelson. Roche raised his eyebrows.

"Can you read this?"

"Pretty well. One gets to pick up something of a good many languages, knocking about the world."

"You come from Chatham, don't you? A sailor, I suppose?"

"Ship's cook."

"What a pity it is you sailors can't keep off the drink," said the chaplain, closing the book and laying it down. "Why don't you sign the pledge? An intelligent young fellow like you — you ought not to be here."

Gardiner stared; then he laughed. "I think you've got

hold of the wrong pig this time, sir. I'm not a drunk and dis."

"You're in for beating your wife, aren't you? I hope you're not going to tell me you did that when you were sober."

"Have you left off beating your wife?" murmured Gardiner with irrepressible levity. "Neither drunk nor sober, sir. Couldn't, not possessing one. That's my next-door neighbor — West, B15. I'm B14 — Gardiner."

Mr. Roche was not at all disconcerted. "Gardiner?" he repeated, consulting his notebook. "Oh ah; I must have mistaken the number. Gardiner. Yes, I remember about you." He looked him over with his cool eye. There was a shade of difference in his manner. B14 did not stand on a par with B15. Mr. Roche was very decidedly not a democrat. "And how much longer have you to serve?"

"Four months."

Roche's eyes continued to dwell on him with an expression that the prisoner could not read; it was speculative and appraising, and seemed to refer back to private thoughts which had nothing to do with the present. "You've never been a Territorial?" he asked unexpectedly.

"No," said Gardiner, a little surprised.

"Ah! Well, I'll see you again some other day, Gardiner. At present I must go and pay my call next door."

"Thank you, sir," said Gardiner dutifully. He be-thought himself to add, as Roche got up: "It's not true, sir, is it, that there's a war scare on?"

"Who told you anything about it?"

"I heard something — of course, sir, we do talk among ourselves to a certain extent, can't help it. I know you're not supposed to tell us news, but I thought in a case like this perhaps you might stretch a point. Is there a row in Ireland or what?"

"There is no scare, and no row in Ireland," said Roche. His manner had often a touch of rhetoric. "There is Armageddon. Germany and Austria are attacking Russia, France, and ourselves."

"My hat!" said Gardiner. He straightened up; his face lighted, his eye sparkled. "Oh, my hat! What wouldn't I give to be in the army!"

"You won't be the first to say that to-day," said Roche; "but if you were in the army you might not be alive to congratulate yourself on the fact to-morrow. The Germans have occupied Luxemburg, they are sweeping across Belgium; soon, I expect, they will be in Paris, and then it will be our turn. And God knows — Steady, man! What are you doing?"

Gardiner was clutching his arm. "Belgium?" he gasped. "But they're neutral!"

"Germany announces that she is not to be bound by scraps of paper."

Gardiner sat down on his stool and took his head in his hands. Roche had heard a part of his story; not enough to explain his emotion. He laid his hand on the prisoner's shoulder. "You wish you were free to go and help?" he said, his deep musical voice vibrating. "Poor fellow, so do I — so do I."

One queer by-product of the war was the general eagerness to bear one another's burdens, the Christmas Carol atmosphere of good temper and good-will. In prison this feeling worked a miracle; it drew together prisoners and warders. The day's news was whispered without rebuke under the very noses of the guardians of silence; sometimes they even whispered it themselves. Roche went boldly to the governor (he did not lack courage, that young man; he had already half-a-dozen quarrels on his hands, including one with Leonard Scott about vestments), and by special permission started his Sunday service each week with a summary of news. There was not much to tell in that first month. On the 6th *The Times* gravely stated that mobilization could not be completed till the 16th; on the 18th came the announcement that the whole Expeditionary Force was already across the water. Liège was making its gal-

lant defense; the Russians were pouring into East Prussia; there was a battle near Dinant in which the French were victorious. Next, the evening papers of the 24th baldly announced the fall of Namur. Heart-shaking news. It shook England; it was then that the recruits began to pour in, thirty thousand a day, so that the height limit had to be raised to check the flow. All these things Roche reported to a congregation which hung upon his lips.

He did not at first report, because he did not believe, the rumors of atrocities at Visé and elsewhere which were current in those early days. Few responsible men did take account of such fantastic nightmares. They were whispered in the prison nevertheless. But there came a Sunday in September when Roche, making a little pause after his summary, began again, gravely: "It is stated, and I believe it to be true, that the German army in Belgium is committing, by order and in cold blood, the foulest abominations. The old university town of Louvain and its splendid library have been burned to the ground and the inhabitants massacred. The same sort of thing is reported from other towns and villages. The men—peaceable working men—are driven out in batches and shot. The women are given to the soldiery and then bayoneted. Children have been shot, stabbed, mutilated, crucified. In the little town of Dinant—"

There was a slight disturbance. A prisoner in one of the back rows struggled to his feet and called out something; a couple of warders popped instantly out of their sentry-boxes and hustled him away. The chapel door closed upon them; Mr. Roche continued his address. The only person who recognized the brawler, and saw the significance of the incident, was Dr. Scott; and even he, though he had heard of the Bellevue, had never heard of Lettice Smith.

"Is the doctor within, mistress?"

"What d'ye want him for?"

"I would like a word with him."

"Well, you'll have to go without it, then. Think I'm goin' to rout him out from his breakfast for the likes of you? No fear!"

"I'm thinkin', mistress, he'll maybe no' be pleased if ye refuse. The thing is pressing —"

"And so's his breakfast pressing, ain't it? I've no patience with the lot of you — comin' trapesin' round here at all hours, never letting him get a bite in peace —"

"What's the matter, Katie?" asked Dr. Scott himself, coming out into the passage with his napkin in his hand. "Who wants me? Oh, it's you, Mackenzie, is it? What's brought you round here at this time of day?"

Chief Warder Mackenzie, a large and fatherly Scot, smiled his acknowledgments; he was one of those who liked the little doctor. "Well, sir, I'd no' have disturrbed ye at yrr breakfast, but I thought ye should know. There is one of the men took sick. Warder Barnes tellt me when I came on duty this mornin', and I'm no' sure what to think o' the matter maself. He'll make no reply to any words o' mine; I doubt he didna hear what I said. I thought maybe if ye'd take a look at him —"

"Take a look at him? Of course I'll take a look at him! Who is it?"

"B14, sir."

"B14!"

Casting down his napkin on the nearest chair, Scott came as he was, bare-headed, across the prison grounds in the early sunshine. Gardiner was still in the old wing of the prison; as his visitors came into the gloomy corridor, after the brightness outside, they had to look to their feet to avoid tumbling over the orderly's broom. When the cell was opened, Scott at first could see nothing. He made a step forward at random. "Take care, sir, Barnes tellt me he was violent the morn!" said Mackenzie, brushing hastily past; and then, in gruff but not unkindly tones, "Now then, B14, wake up! Here's the doctor for ye!"

There was no answer; but Scott could see now. B14 lay on the ground, pressed, flattened, wedged into the angle

between the floor and the wall, his head burrowing blindly into the corner; and there he continued to lie, a mere line against the wall of his cell. He was in shirt and breeches, but his bed, which should have been folded up and put away hours ago, was still standing with the blankets tossed about it. Mackenzie stooped to shake him up, but he was put aside. “Leave this to me, officer,” said the doctor with authority, and knelt down himself beside the prisoner.

“Gardiner, my poor fellow!” he said with exquisite gentleness. “Come, come! What are you doing here on the ground?” He laid a hand on his shoulder. “Gardiner! don’t you hear me?”

With a shudder which seemed literally to tear him away from the wall, Gardiner rolled over and clutched that friendly hand in both his own.

“Scott, Scott! for God’s sake get me out of this!”

His forehead sank down till it rested, burning, on Scott’s wrist. Moved beyond all knowledge of himself, the doctor laid his free hand on the cropped head. It was streaming with sweat; a continuous tremor shook the whole frame.

“Gardiner, my poor, poor fellow! what is it? what’s wrong?”

“I can’t stand it, I can’t stand it.” The words came in a rushing murmur, barely intelligible in their ebb and flow. “Get me out, Scott! oh, get me out! Say it’s killing me. Say it’s driving me mad—it is. Say anything, only get me out. You will, won’t you? Oh, God bless you! I knew you would.” He raised for a moment his haggard and exhausted face, and crawled a little closer. “Not to be let off altogether. I don’t ask that. Just long enough to get across and back again—I’d give my parole, and serve double time afterwards, to make up. A month would do it. It’s as easy as winking. I pass anywhere as a Spaniard, and with a forged passport—Ribeira would lend me his, I know—why, I could do it in a fortnight, less! Oh, get me out, Scott; you *can’t* keep me here, you can’t, you can’t! For the love of Christ, get me out somehow!”

He lay panting in heavy gasps, like a dying animal.

Scott's heart sank down, down; how could he tell this frantic creature that what he asked was impossible? Get him out!—he had already strained his influence to the uttermost for B14; he could hear Captain Harding's sarcastic little laugh: "Your pet patient again, doctor?" Laws are not to be bent because prisoners suffer. He could not quite make out what it was all about, or why Gardiner should be so desperately anxious to get over to Belgium; something to do with his property, he supposed; yet this did not seem like a question of property. Meanwhile the prisoner was off again on a fresh stream of supplications, this time in a murmur so low, so wild and incoherent, that Scott had to bend right down to his lips. What in heaven's name was he raving about now?

"If it had been anything but *this*, anything else on earth but *this*; you can't keep a man here looking on at this; eyes weren't given you for this. Because it's not nightmare, you know, it's fact; they do do it; there were those stories Denis used to tell of 1870 . . . and you heard Roche yourself . . . all night long, all night long . . . *given to the soldiery and bayoneted* . . . perhaps its happening now, this instant, and I here, oh, my God, my God, my God, my God!—and if you'd only let me free, I *know* I could have saved her!"

He broke down suddenly into the most frightful sobbing. "Gardiner! Stop it!" the doctor's voice rang out. The prisoner quivered and cowered under the word of command; his voice went up in a sort of hysterical crow, and stopped, dead. He lay like a log. Scott tried to speak again, and found his throat dry. So that was it! There were things in this war which had tried even his faith. Neither wounds, nor death—secure of eternity, he could afford to disregard the sufferings of this span-long life—but the fate of the women. It did not seem right, he could not reconcile it with his idea of the divine justice, that evil men should be allowed to stain the soul. What was he to say now to Gardiner? Platitudes? He had nothing else to offer. He was helpless—and at that word faith sprang up to claim the aid of omnipotence. He had known the love of God all those years;

could he not trust Him to do what He would with His own?

He turned to the prisoner.

"I can't let you out, Gardiner," he said sadly, giving him the truth because he had no choice. "I'll do what I can, but I know it won't be any good. Here you are and here you'll have to stay for the next four months, and if what you are afraid of happens it will have to happen, and you will have to bear it. God is the judge. Only it's up to you to choose how you'll bear it: whether you'll give in, as you're doing now, or whether you'll stand up like a man and fight it out. If you can't save your friends, you may be able to avenge them —"

As he spoke his eye fell on Gardiner's hand, and the words died on his lips. Those contracted fingers would never hold a rifle. Scott felt sick. He got up from his knees.

"Will I light the gas, sir?" asked Mackenzie's business-like tones.

Scott assented mechanically, feeling for his clinical; but when the light sprang out he had to take himself in hand and fairly force himself to work, against the most intense reluctance he had ever felt in his life. Gardiner stirred not; he had to prize open his teeth before he could insert the thermometer. A gleam of white showed under the eyelids. When Scott felt his pulse, the hand fell back inert.

"Puir fellow, he looks bad," said Mackenzie dispassionately.

"Yes, it's a case for the hospital. You did quite right to fetch me, Mackenzie. I'll send a couple of orderlies with a stretcher. When's your best time? I should like you to be here to superintend."

"I'll no' be on duty the morn, but I'll be back again after dinner, sir."

"Very well, I'll have them here at one o'clock. Leave the bed as it is, and tell Barnes to keep an eye on him in the meanwhile."

"Verra good, sir."

Scott was going out, without another glance at the prisoner, when Mackenzie touched his arm. "He's lookin'

at you, sir," he whispered. Scott turned. The line of white under the eyelids had widened slightly; the gleam of the pupil was visible. While he watched, the lips unclosed, and the dead (indeed it had that effect) spoke:

"I — won't — go to hospital."

"You'll be better off there, Gardiner," said Scott very gently. "I'll give you something to send you to sleep."

The eyes opened a little further. After a moment the prone figure heaved itself up and struggled into a sitting position against the wall.

"I won't go to hospital, and I won't take your bloody stuff, you ————."

Impossible to convey the low ferocity, the bestial drawling insolence of voice and manner. Scott flushed like a school-girl and involuntarily recoiled a step. "Hold your mouth, ye foul-tongued, ungratefu' devil; the doctor's the best friend ye have, and better than ye deserve!" cried Mackenzie angrily.

"Hold your own mouth, Sandy Mackenzie, or I'll knock every bloody one of those gold-stopped teeth you're so proud of down your bloody throat — by God, I will!"

Mackenzie turned purple; but before he could get into action Scott intervened.

"Let be, officer," he commanded with authority. "This has gone beyond you and me. The man's not responsible; he doesn't know what he is saying."

"I won't go to your bloody hospital — I won't — I won't," cried Gardiner, his voice rising to a shriek. Scott turned in the doorway: Mackenzie, staunch U.P., was less shocked than he would have believed possible to watch him make the sign of the cross and to catch the muttered Latin of his commendation. If ever he had seen a man possessed with a devil and in need of exorcism, he saw him then.

When they had gone out, Gardiner lay for some moments passive; then with infinite toil, steadying himself with his shaking hand against the wall, he got to his feet. What was he going to do next? He knew that perfectly. He was not

going to hospital; not he! He was going to escape. For in the terminology of the jail suicide is only a form of prison-breaking, and the letter " E " is inscribed impartially over the door of the convict who makes a dash for liberty through the fogs of Dartmoor, and of the wretched youth who tries to hang himself by his neckerchief from the ventilator of his cell.

Why should he go on living? Lettice was dead, or would be by the time they let him free to save her; and he absolutely declined to lie here and watch her die. One night of that was enough. Not that at this moment Gardiner cared a straw for Lettice or any one else; he was lower than the lowest criminal in the jail; he was in the mood to join the Germans in their hellish work. Broken with that night of agony, he had clutched like a drowning man at Scott's hand, he had crawled in abject abasement to his feet, imploring mercy, and had been refused. " Hissing hot with burning tears," he had been plunged into the waters of despair. The shock was too great. A flaw started out, running right across his nature, separating him from his former self. Gardiner had gone over to the devil.

Well, if he meant to do it he must do it at once, before he was transferred to hospital, where his bed would be one among a dozen in a ward. The best time would be between dinner at twelve and the resumption of work at one, the interval when the warders went off by relays to their own meal. He had heard through his torpor enough to know that he was safe until then. This settled, he lay down on his bed and took up his book, presenting a disarming picture of tranquillity when the orderlies came round with the tins of food. The flap of his spy-hole was raised just as he finished his meal, and he was glad to see it; now, in all probability, he would have a good twenty minutes to himself before he was disturbed again.

Suicide is common in prisons, and prisoners have their own ways of compassing it. You may hang yourself — a disagreeably slow death where no drop is available. You may, if you are strong and active, throw yourself over the

wire-netting that guards the staircase, and be dashed to pieces on the flags below. You may even, if you are very resolute, hack your throat open with the blunt piece of corrugated tin which serves as a dinner knife. Gardiner had his own plan. Some time since his gas globe had got broken, and he had managed to secrete a splinter of glass. Difficult to hide it, since every prisoner is searched twice a day; but, again, they have their own ways of hiding things. It is on record that a sovereign has been found on a man who had been in jail for a year. Gardiner hid his bit of glass under his tongue. It was small enough for that, but it was large enough to sever the artery in his thigh.

He turned his back to the door and drew the bed-clothes round him to hide the flow of blood. Then he leant out to find the splinter in the crack where it lay hid. At that moment he heard the tread of a warder outside. They wear list slippers, and to a free man would be inaudible; but prisoners have cat's ears. Gardiner drew in his hand to let the man go by. Lucky he did so. With the usual tremendous rattle and crash his door was unlocked and flung wide.

"Ye're to dress yoursel', B14, and come along with me."

CHAPTER XXVII

SHE BEING DEAD YET SPEAKETH

The dead abide with us! Though stark and cold
Earth seems to grip them, they are with us still.
They have forged our chains of being for good or ill;
And their invisible hands these hands yet hold.

The Dead.

"Yes, Mackenzie? What now?"

"I've brought ye B14, sir."

"Why don't you show him in, then?"

"Well, sir, I'm thinking he's no' altogether to be trustit. I thought maybe if ye'd permit me to be in the room —"

"Trusted? Nonsense, man! I'm not made of glass. Bring him in at once." And as Mackenzie turned reluctantly to obey, the Governor added: "You can stand in a corner and see fair play, if you like. But I don't think a little whippersnapper like our friend would make much of it if he tried to tackle me, eh, Mackenzie?"

"Well, sir, maybe no," said Mackenzie, with his slow smile.

Captain Harding, a lean Anglo-Indian, all bone and sinew, got up and posted himself with his hands under his coat-tails, back to the fire. He felt the cold, and there was a blaze in his grate on many a chilly summer evening. His room was comfortably furnished with a Turkey carpet and deep leathern arm-chairs. To many a prisoner it had seemed a glimpse of paradise. B14, however, took no notice; his apathetic face did not change, only he edged surreptitiously towards the hearth. "You can come near the fire if you like," said Harding, eyeing him sharply; and as Gardiner stumbled forward he put a hand on his shoulder. "What's the matter with you? Are you sick?"

Gardiner raised his eyes ; in their darkness shone a metallic feral glare. "I'm perfectly well," he said, on the sullen verge of insolence.

"He's for the hospital, sir," said Mackenzie from the background, with an apologetic cough.

"Sit down," said the Governor shortly. He sat down himself, at his table, and turned over some papers. "Your name is Henry de la Cruz Gardiner?"

"De la Cruz," Gardiner interrupted, correcting him as he had corrected Lettice — how long ago? — only in those days he had not spoken in that tone. Again he edged nearer to the fire. He was cold to the marrow of his bones, colder than he had ever been in his life.

"Ah! Well, Gardiner, I'm sorry to say I have some bad news for you. I've received a letter from your father. It is against the rules for me to give it to you ; but I can either read it or give you a summary. Shall I read it?" Gardiner made no sign ; he was staring sullenly into the flames. Captain Harding, after another sharp glance at him over the top of the sheet, cleared his throat and began.

"'My own darling boy —'"

The prisoner stirred ; that address touched some chord in his mind.

"'My own darling boy, I have two pieces of very bad news for you. I have been making inquiries at Headquarters in Town from all refugees, but for a long time could hear nothing of your part of the country. Last Friday, however, they wrote me that a man had come in from Bouillon. I went up at once, and heard the whole story from his lips. Alas! my dear boy, I am grieved to tell you that your friends have suffered most cruelly from Those Brutes. The village of Rochehaut was burned on 28th August, and a large number of the men were massacred. Your friend the Curé was cut down with the Sacred Vessels in his hands. I could learn nothing of the fate of the Women of the village, but it seems that in the outlying farms and cottages every kind of abomination was committed by Those Devils. I asked particularly about your hotel, and oh my dear dear boy, he tells me that

it has been burned to the ground. Those Devils Incarnate (God punish them) first stole everything they had a mind to, and then set fire to the building. He saw it burning with his own eyes, as he escaped through the woods. He says that all the servants had left on the outbreak of war, and that no one was left in it but a caretaker. I do not know whether this was your little friend Miss Merion-Smith, but I should be afraid so, as she has not returned to England. What makes it particularly sad is that we hear (and this is my second piece of bad news) that poor Denis Merion-Smith is among the missing. He was sent on a bombing raid to Aix-la-Chapelle, and failed to return. One of his companions fancies that he was hit by Anti-Aircraft fire; when last seen he was "flying rather wild," but his machine seemed to be still under control. Oh my dear dear boy, my heart bleeds for you. I wish I could see you. These senseless rules and regulations make my blood boil, in times like these. I have written to the Home Secretary, but he is no good at all; he seems incapable of understanding the simplest thing. I wonder what we pay him for. It is too, too dreadful to think of the fate of that poor girl, and of poor Denis. This awful war is breaking all our hearts. May God never forgive the wicked Author of it. Tom writes that he is "going strong"—whatever that may mean; I wish he would not use this American slang. Of course he does not tell me where he is, but I believe it is somewhere on the River Aisne. God keep and comfort you, my own dear boy. From your loving Father.'

"That is all," said Captain Harding, folding the sheet.

Gardiner's lips moved; he muttered something inaudible. "What's that?" asked the Governor sharply. The murmur was repeated; it sounded like, "I killed"—him or her, uncertain which. Captain Harding could make nothing of it. He looked dubiously at the hunched-up figure, crouching into itself, staring vacantly at the carpet. Scott's pet patient—yes; but it was a hard case, no doubt of it. "You must keep up a good heart," he said kindly. "Many of the missing turn up again safe and sound, you know; and I've heard that

flying officers are particularly well treated by the Germans when they fall into their hands. No use going to meet trouble half-way and believing the worst before you know it's happened."

"I killed her," muttered the prisoner again.

"You what?"

"I killed her. I sent her out there to her death. I killed her —"

Harding laid hands on the chair and wheeled it round to the light. "What's that? What are you talking about?"

"Nothing," said Gardiner. His eyes blinked stupidly in the sunshine. "May I — may I have my letter?" he asked, half stretching out his hand.

"I'm afraid that's against the rules, but I can read it to you again, if you like."

The hand dropped.

"Is there any question you want to ask?"

"No," said Gardiner; adding, as an afterthought: "No, thank you, sir." It was the first time he had used the title of respect. Certainly a hard case, and the Governor was very sorry for him, and not quite satisfied; but there was nothing to be done. He looked at Mackenzie, and Mackenzie touched B14's arm. Stumbling to his feet, he got out of the room and down the passages somehow to his cell, where he dropped face downwards on the bed.

"I'll be round in twa-three minutes to take you to hospital," said Mackenzie, preparing to withdraw.

"Mackenzie."

"Well? What ails ye now?"

The prisoner had struggled up on his elbow. "Tell Dr. Scott I want to see him."

"Ye'll be seein' him in half-an-hour."

"I want to see him in half-a-minute."

"He's awa' at his lunch," said the warder. "I've disturbed him at his breakfast for ye already the morn; can't you let him get a bite in peace? I wouldna be hard on ye, but ye must be reasonable."

"Mackenzie!"

Again the prisoner called him back. He had swung his feet to the ground; he looked wild and dangerous enough for anything. "You bring Scott along. You'll be sorry for it if you don't."

"I tell you he's awa at his—"

"Man, man! What's that to do with it? You fetch him here double-quick time, or I tell you you'll be sorry for it—you'll be sorry all the days of your life! *Will you go?*"

Mackenzie caught that green glitter, and he did not like it; he did not like it at all. It sent him off, shaking his head, hotfoot to the doctor's quarters, to face again the redoubtable Katie. Meanwhile the prisoner sprang up and paced his cell, up and down, with the strength of fever. When the doctor came in, he was standing in the middle of the floor, his stool held by the leg in one hand, in the other a small object which he thrust violently forward.

"Here, Scott, catch hold of this! You've been long enough coming—you're only just in time!"

Scott looked down at the splinter of glass. "So that was how you meant to do it, hey?"

"Yes, that was how I meant to do it. And don't you let me get hold of it again, and don't you send me to that damned hospital of yours, unless you want murder done. I've had about as much as I can stick. I won't be herded with a mob of filthy jail-birds. Keep off—if you lay a finger on me I'll bash your brains out against that wall!"

Scott with absolute fearlessness stepped forward and caught his wrist.

"Drop that stool—drop it! That's better. Now, listen to me. I'm not going to leave you here—wait! I've not done—and I'm not going to send you to hospital either. You'll go to the padded cell."

"The padded cell?" echoed Gardiner, "the padded cell? I never thought of that. You have some sense in your head, Scott. See here"—his face had changed, relaxed into something like humanity; he seized the doctor's hand and spoke rapidly, earnestly—"I'm sane for the moment; for heaven's sake listen to what I say! Five minutes ago I was

crazy to kill myself. Five minutes hence I shall want to again, and if by any hook or crook I can, I shall. So you put me in that padded cell, and you keep me there! Don't you let me out — don't you let me out on any pretext whatever! I shall beg and pray you, I shall howl like all the devils in hell, I shall invent excuses I haven't the ingenuity to imagine now, but whatever I say or do, don't you listen! It's these next twelve hours I'm afraid of. If you'll keep me in there, hermetically sealed, till to-morrow morning, I shall be all right. Will you do it?" Scott did not answer; he had drawn him towards the window, and was looking and looking into his eyes as if he would have probed his inmost soul. "It's a risk? Yes, but it's that either way. Let me go down fighting, Scott!" Still no reply. "You a Christian and afraid!" Gardiner scoffed.

"No, I'm not afraid," said the little man curtly. He released him. "I'll do it."

"You will? You swear you won't let me go?"

"My word's my bond."

He went out. The prisoner fell back on his pallet and threw his arm across his eyes. "Now I've done it!" he murmured with a long breath. "Now I've burned my boats! Are you satisfied, Lettice? My life for yours: is it a fair exchange? You always wanted this — well, fair or not, it's the best I can do. . . ."

The padded cell, for weak-minded criminals, resembles on a large scale one of those lined work-boxes which young ladies used in the seventies, except that stout yellow canvas takes the place of quilted satin. Padding a yard thick covers walls and floor. There is a small window under the ceiling; a squint, as usual, in the door; and another, high up, commanding every corner of the cell. No furniture, not so much as a bed.

Prisoners have been known to get their nails under the canvas and rip it from the walls, at a cost to the British taxpayer of some sixty pounds. B14 did not do that; but within half-an-hour he was raving, as he had foretold. Warders passing outside could hear the thump of his body flinging

itself against the padded door, and his shrieks filled the ward. There was nothing out of the way: prisoners were often brought in raving in delirium tremens, whose yells were quite as loud, and their language a shade worse. The man on duty contented himself with periodic peeps to make sure that B14 was not damaging the canvas.

Scott was unable to listen with the same equanimity. Yet he could not keep away; again and again, on one pretext or another, back he came to Ward B. Once he peeped through the spy-hole, just before he went off for the night. The prisoner was crouching under the door; his cries had for the moment sunk into whimpers: "Scott, let me out — let me out, Scott!" Scott fled from the place as though the devil were at his heels.

Returning at daybreak, he entered the prison just as breakfast was going round. Chief Warder Mackenzie greeted him with a cheerful good-day.

"Ye're early abroad, sir."

"Yes," said Scott; "I was restless. What sort of a night have you had with B14, eh?"

"Well, sir, they do tell me he was terrible noisy at first, but he's quieted down a bittie now. Maybe ye'll like to take a look at him?"

"I should," said Scott, falling in beside the big man. Mackenzie walked along, discoursing amiably about the war and his nephew in the Black Watch, without seeming to notice his companion's silence. All was quiet in Ward B; nobody shrieked or moaned any more.

"He won't have much appetite for his breakfast, I'm thinkin'," remarked the warder, leisurely unlocking the door. "Ye'll go in, sir?"

Scott stepped lightly across the spongy canvas. B14 was lying in a heap under the window, his arm across his face; he did not stir. Scott's heart gave one great throb and seemed to stop; he drew away the arm.

Gardiner's dark eyes were looking up at him with a faint gleam; his voice came, the mere ghost of a whisper.

"Sucks for — Satan — this time — doctor!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

DEUTSCHLAND ÜBER ALLES

Oh! la foule joyeuse,
Le soir,
Autour des tables, sur les trottoirs,
Et la bière mousseuse
Débordant des verres,
Et les longues pipes de terre
Dont on suit des yeux la fumée,
Le cœur réjoui, l'âme apaisée!

Combien de temps, combien de temps,
O ma Patrie,
Tendras-tu patiemment
Dans la nuit
Tes mains meurtries?

EMILE CAMMAERTS.

LETTICE and Dorothea arrived at the Bellevue in May. By the end of July their guests were scattering like autumn leaves, and on the day of the ultimatum Lettice took matters into her own hands, sent off the servants and shut the hotel. She did not in the least want to follow them — Lettice was not fond of running away; but for Dorothea's sake she was making up her mind to that sacrifice, when she discovered that Dorothea herself had other views. She go and hide? Rather not! She was going to stay and see the fun. (At that time it was still possible for the Dorotheas of this world to talk of seeing the fun.)

"I can nurse, you know," she said, sitting on the dresser in the big deserted kitchen, her hands in her tweed pockets, her brown legs swinging, her eyes sparkling with agreeable excitement. "I've got every old certificate and medal the Red Cross people give. It was the one thing I was let do as a kid — go to nursing lectures; uncle was always fancying himself ill, you see, and I had to look after him. Oh yes, I

can nurse like billy-o! Go back to England and knit socks? Not for this child!"

But, but — but it's not safe," objected Lettice, pensively rubbing her nose.

"Safe? Nonsense! What do you suppose is going to happen to us? The Germans will never get within miles of this, and even suppose they did we're non-combatants — we should be all right. This isn't the Dark Ages. Besides, if we run away, who's to look after the hotel?"

Lettice said nothing.

"Suppose they quartered soldiers here? It's just the place they might. The poilu's a darling, and I love him madly, but what do you think Mr. Gardiner's furniture would be like after a week of him? There simply must be somebody to clear the rooms and see to things. You sent over specially to be in charge, and then want to go and run away! I'm surprised at you, Lettice. But whoever else shows pupusilianinimity" (there were some words Dorothea really could not get!), "*I shall always be found ready to die at my post.*"

"But —" said Lettice. Dorothea jumped down in a whirlwind and shook her by the shoulders.

"Oh, pooh! I won't go home — I won't — I won't — so now! Do you understand that? And you know perfectly well you don't want to either. As if I couldn't see! You're saying this simply for my sake; and now you know I'm not going in any case you may as well give in without any more fuss. I'm tired of arguing with four buts and a grunt!"

"Well —" said Lettice, varying her formula with an eighth of an inch of smile, and allowing herself to pretend to be over-persuaded.

So they stayed.

In common with many other people, Dorothea was not happy in her predictions. On Friday, 21st August, a French army passed through Bouillon. On Saturday a battle was fought near Maissin, in which twelve thousand Germans were put out of action. On Sunday began the retreat of the

French towards Sedan. And on Monday, 24th August, the French commander warned M. Hunin, burgomaster and proprietor of the Hôtel de la Poste, that it would be prudent to evacuate the town. All the bells in Bouillon rang the tocsin, and many people fled, abandoning their houses as they stood. A few hours later the Germans entered the city.

The abandoned houses were at once broken open and systematically plundered. Wine, beer, bedding were commandeered; pictures and valuables of all sorts were packed up and sent to Germany. More careful than their comrades at Louvain, the victors here secured and stole the famous library of the Trappist monks of Cordemois. Next morning a notice defining the duties of the inhabitants was posted up in the market-place, on the walls of the hotel where the last French Emperor had slept on the night before Sedan.

PROCLAMATION!

1. The town of Bouillon will pay a WAR LEVY of 500,000 francs.

2. Belgian or French soldiers must be handed over as PRISONERS OF WAR before 4 P.M. Citizens failing to obey this order will be sentenced to PENAL SERVITUDE FOR LIFE in Germany. Every soldier found after that hour will be SHOT.

3. Arms, powder, dynamite must be handed over before 4 P.M. Penalty, to be SHOT.

4. INTERDICTION to be out in the streets DURING THE HOURS OF DARKNESS. All houses must be completely OPEN and LIGHTED. Groups of more than FIVE persons are STRICTLY FORBIDDEN.

5. Citizens must salute every German officer with respect. Failing this, the officer is entitled to extort it BY ANY MEANS IN HIS POWER.

6. If any HOSTILE ACTION is attempted the town will be BURNT DOWN and a THIRD OF THE MALE POPULATION WILL BE SHOT; without distinction of persons, the innocent will suffer with the guilty. The people of Bouillon must under-

stand that there is no crime greater or more terrible than to endanger the existence of the town and its inhabitants by hostile action against the German army.

The under-mentioned have been taken as HOSTAGES for the good behavior of the town.

THE COMMANDER OF DIVISION.

Followed a list of forty names, including both the priests. Fined, pillaged, terrorized, Bouillon yet thought itself lucky when the news came in from the country.

From Rochehaut no one had escaped; the warning did not come in time. Uhlans rode into the village on Monday afternoon and calmly took possession. Rochehaut was cringing terrified, slavishly obedient. Not a dog could lift his tongue against the invaders without being zealously throttled; and when Madame Mercier's fat sow got in the way of the colonel, madame bundled out after her right under the horse's hoofs, to save, not her pig, but the dignity of a German officer. Alas! in spite of all, the colonel took a *billet de parterre* on the nearest dung-hill. He got up swearing, and for one awful moment Rochehaut trembled; but he went into the Petit Caporal to change, and Rochehaut breathed again, and went to pick up madame. That peril was averted.

For two days nothing happened, and the villagers crept out of their shuttered houses, and began timidly to go about their work of getting in the harvest. On the third morning, Thursday, 28th August, a poacher in the woods near the river let off his gun at a rabbit. He did not hit, and he was a Botassart man; but Rochehaut was the nearest village, and Rochehaut was held responsible. Moreover, that morning a patrol of Uhlans had gone out, to come back with ten empty saddles. French cavalry had laid an ambush for them in the woods near Vresse. Somebody must have given information to those French cavalry. It was necessary to make an example.

As a preliminary, a cordon was drawn round the village, and the people were collected in the square. Of the men, some thirty of the youngest were marked off for deportation

to Germany, where they might be made use of for gathering in the harvest of the Fatherland; the remaining twenty found an end to their troubles in a trench under the churchyard wall. The women and children, who had been confined in the church during the fusillade, were let out to dig the general grave, and then suffered to go — not to their homes, however, for these were condemned. "They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the rocks, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." Poor old Madame Mercier, whose leg had got broken in her struggles with the colonel's horse, had been overlooked in the general confusion and left behind in her cottage. She could not get downstairs, but she dragged herself to the window and shrieked for help to the soldiers who were setting fire to her kitchen. The colonel, riding down the street, was annoyed by her cries; he looked up, and recognized the frightened old face. "One of you stop that old woman's noise!" he shouted. After all, why not? It was her own fault; why had she not obeyed orders, and gone to the church with the rest? "Es ist unsere Pflicht," said the Uhlans.

It was Lettice's turn that afternoon to fetch the daily loaf from the Boulangerie Lapouse, opposite the church. Her path led over the hill past the crucifix, across the fields and through a corner of Gardiner's enchanted wood, which here ran down quite close to the village. She toiled along, as usual with her head in the clouds, but her dreams were broken and her steps stayed by a sudden burst of firing. She paused in the fringes of the wood.

All down the street men in gray were systematically spraying the houses with petrol; others were taking their choice of the furniture. The shops and cafés of the square were already in flames. The colonel sat his horse looking on. Suddenly a boy of fifteen bolted like a rabbit out of one of the blazing doorways and down the blazing street. He too had disobeyed orders. A laugh, a leveled rifle, and the poor little rabbit bounced into the air with a squeak like a mechanical doll, legs and arms jerking, and then went flat on the ground, its defeatured face in the midden. The flaxen

poll became a crimson blob. Lettice saw that. Her first impulse was to rush forward and attack the murderers with her bare hands; the next sent her running blindly back through the woods by the way she had come. She was not frightened — it was far too vast a thing for personal fear; but she was sick with loathing, as at the sight of some monstrosity which ought never to have been allowed to see the sun.

The world never looked quite the same to Lettice after that day. Blind and deaf, her mind blasted bare of thought, she crossed the fields and scrambled down the orchard, and came round the corner of the house into the courtyard. There she was brought up with a cold hand at her heart. Several wagons were drawn up at the door; men in gray, that accursed field-gray which has been hated as no uniform before, were loading them under the direction of an officer. And Dorothea? Faint with foreboding, seeing crimson blobs in patches on the flags, Lettice groped towards the side door — and was met by Dorothea herself coming out, her face all pink and white with tears.

"Oh, Lettice, Lettice!" she said, "they're going to burn the house — they give us a quarter of an hour to turn out!"

Lettice put a hand on her arm, partly for support, partly to make sure of her reality; and by common consent they turned, as they stood in the doorway, to watch the lading of the carts. All went by clockwork. To one, the soldiers were bringing out the contents of Lettice's linen chest, her blankets, sheets, etc.; to another the furniture and plate. They packed like professional movers. There were tarpaulins ready to cover the carts when full.

"There's my chest of drawers," said Dorothea under her breath. "Oh, Lettice, oh, Lettice! what is that man doing with my best *crêpe de Chine* nighties? Oh, look, he's packing them all up — he *can't* be going to wear them himself, he must be taking them for his best girl in Germany, and they're every single one embroidered with my name in full — oh, good gracious, how can he?" She broke into a hysterical

giggle. "Oh, really, I do think Germans have funny sort of minds! Oh, look, look, there's your bureau out of the den —"

Lettice's bureau — it was Gardiner's bureau, the one he always used, the very one he had bought from Madame Hasquin in Lettice's presence; he loved it too much to let it out of his own room. The officer, staying his men with a word, began to look through the drawers, presumably for valuables. The file of Lettice's household bills he tossed aside; letters and other papers he skimmed, before rejecting them.

Lettice's hand fell from Dorothea's arm. She walked straight across the courtyard to his side. "What are you doing with that bureau?" she asked.

"Requisitioned for the army," was the curt reply.

"You mean, you want it yourself," said Lettice. "It's stealing; and you and your men are just thieves and murderers."

He turned, then, and looked at her, while Dorothea plucked at her sleeve, whispering frantic entreaties. But only a firing party could have silenced Lettice at that moment.

"No, madam, it is not stealing, it is war," said the German in an altered voice. "You are conquered; you have no longer any property or any rights but what we choose to allow you. You would do well to remember that. And let me advise you in future to be more careful of what you say. Not all my compatriots have an English education to look back upon."

Then Dorothea pulled her away, still reluctant; and it was Dorothea, in the nightmare minutes that followed, who sorted and packed in wild haste all she thought they could carry. There was not much left to take. She stuffed some clothes into a couple of pillow-cases, and dragged the silent Lettice out at the back, past some soldiers who with the same deadly method were smashing the windows in turn and spraying the interior. These men wore broad belts to which were attached a hatchet, a syringe, a small shovel, and a revolver. On the belts were the words, "Company of Incendiaries,"

also, "God with us." As Dorothea had said, Germans have funny sort of minds.

Crouching at the top of the orchard behind the house, the two girls watched the last of the Bellevue. First the petrol caught, an amethystine aura flickering insubstantial. Then the woodwork kindled, and yellow flames began to twine among that ghostly harebell blue. Orange pennons slid softly through the empty window frames; tiny golden curls started out along the eaves, small and even as a row of gas jets. The flames lengthened, they united, they rippled and flapped up the sky like a banner. They grew many-tinted, according to their fuel — gold, silver, ruby, emerald, amethyst, topaz, metallic blue. Lastly the roof fell in, and a great foursquare of fire puffed up to heaven, with streams of starry sparks, and clouds of glare, and floating flakes of gold. Dorothea was crying; but Lettice, her lips set grimly, watched to the end the destruction of Gardiner's hotel, the home he loved, which he had confided to her care.

Night came, but not darkness. Rochehaut was burning, Poupehan in the valley flared with half-a-dozen haystacks and a house or two, Corbion church was a beacon of tall flames on the hill, Alle's martyrdom showed as a pulsing glow of dusky rose in the overhanging cloud. On the far side of the valley, marching home with their booty down the road from Corbion to Bouillon, the soldiers of the Fatherland were singing, *Deutschland über Alles*.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GOOD HOURS

"... All villages, châteaux, and houses are burnt down during this night. It was a beautiful sight to see the fires all round us in the distance. In every village one finds only heaps of ruins and many dead. Now come the good hours. . . ."—Diary of German private, 4th Comp. Jäger Btln., No. 11., Aug. 23-27, 1914.

What's death?—You'll love me yet!

Pippa Passes.

WHEN the dawn came, crystal-bright and pure, the two girls left the ruins of the Bellevue and wandered off among the hills. They had no food. They did not know where they were going. They did not know where they wanted to go. Soon rain came on, and fell in floods all day. They lost themselves in dim green valleys; they pushed through dripping copses of hazel; they sank ankle-deep in spongy mosses, and waded through unnamed torrents. Once they crouched among the bracken while a gray patrol rode by, shouting and singing, uproariously drunk. A little later they came on a lonely cottage with a dead girl lying across the threshold. She had been bayoneted, and worse. A baby of two years was strung up by the neck to the door handle; another, of only a few weeks, wailed feebly in a pool of blood and water beside the mother. Dorothea darted upon it with a cry; cradling it in her soft arms, against her breast, she stepped over the girl's body into the hut, forgetful of the horror of death in the claims of this minute piece of life. The man of the house was inside. He had been surprised at his dinner, and had defended himself with the carving-knife. He had taken a good deal of killing, as the floor and walls bore witness; nevertheless, the murderers had kicked his body into a corner, sat down at his table, and finished his meal.

Dorothea was searching the shelves for milk or any other

food, when she heard a shout outside, followed by a cry — the oddest little cry she had ever heard. She caught up the knife with which the man had defended himself, and ran out. It was Lettice who had made that odd little sound; she was struggling with an Uhlan, very drunk in the legs but very strong in the arms, who was trying to force her down. Dorothea stuck the knife into his neck from behind, dragged it out and stuck it in again. The man dropped Lettice and wheeled round, firing his revolver; but his hand wavered away, and the shot went into the ground. He sank down with a grunt and lay there between them, the bright blood pumping out scarlet. Dorothea looked at Lettice; her eyes flamed; she held the baby still clasped to her breast.

"I've killed him," she said. "I'm glad."

Lettice did not speak; her hands were at her throat, mechanically settling her tie; she turned and reëntered the forest without a word. "Wait half-a-minute!" Dorothea called after her; and Lettice waited, in the brake, back turned to the house. She had to wait a good many minutes; whether one or sixty, it was all the same to her. Then Dorothea came running up, breathless. "I've found just a drop of milk, and this, see," she said, displaying one of the long Belgian loaves. Lettice was to suppose she had spent her time in ransacking the larder. In point of fact, she had been rolling, hauling, pushing the dead German into the well; she did not wish his body to be the excuse and the signal for a fresh campaign of vengeance.

They spent that night in one of the limestone caves of the Semois. In spite of the milk, in spite of Dorothea's sheltering arms, the baby died of exhaustion in the cold hour before the dawn. Dorothea wept bitter tears, and left it lying covered with ferns, on a bed of moss; she could not bear to pile stones on the tender little limbs and ivory face. A turnip-field gave them a breakfast more sustaining than hazel nuts and blackberries, but for the most part they kept to the woods; they were afraid of the open country. By this time they had lost all sense of direction. The rain still fell hopelessly. There was no sun to guide them; the hills

were all hidden in mist ; and the Semois, when they came on it in its wild and twisting valley, seemed never to flow twice in the same direction. Yet they wandered on, because they had begun wandering and had not spirit to stop.

Towards sunset they came suddenly to the edge of a hill, and saw below them, deep buried in a cup-like hollow, a farm. From where they stood an orchard sloped steeply to the group of white buildings, beyond them the green meadow fell away to a brook ; the opposite slope was a stubble field, crowned with a line of firs.

"Why," said Dorothea, "why —"

They had wandered in a circle and come back to their starting-point. It was the Ferme de la Croix.

Lettice, who had not spoken for hours, found her tongue. "Don't go down," she said, "we shall only find somebody else dead."

"We might find something to eat," said Dorothea, more hopeful. "The house does look all right, and I'm sure Madame Hasquin would give us the supper off her own plate, if she hadn't anything else. But oh, my good gracious ! how we must have wandered ! I'd hoped we were half-way to Mezières by now. And yet, you know, I did think the country seemed to be looking familiar somehow this last half-hour. Don't you come down, Lettice ; you stay here with the things while I go and explore."

Lettice, who was possessed of a dumb devil that day, shifted her bundle from her left hand to her right and said nothing. Slipping from tree to tree down the orchard, Dorothea peeped at the house from under cover. All was still, except the joy-song of a hen which had just laid an egg. Live fowls and live Germans being incompatible, Dorothea came out of hiding and walked boldly up the pebbled path to the door. On either side bloomed roses, dahlias, lavender where the bees were humming. The evening sun came out, and shone peacefully on the white walls. Dorothea rapped. No answer ; only a sandy cat ran out of the bushes and twined round her skirts. She knocked again, then pushed open the door and entered.

A spotless white passage with a dark, uneven, shiny floor and doors on either side, old and irregular. Dorothea opened the first. She saw a pleasant parlor, low-pitched, with lattices facing the sunset; a carved oak press; an eight-day clock, still ticking; a table laid for dinner with beef-steak, gray in its gray greasy gravy, stewed pears, *pommes sautées*, salad in a china bowl, golden country beer in a large decanter. Glasses stood half empty, knives and forks were crossed on half-eaten plates of meat, chairs had been pushed back anyhow. There was no living creature but the cat, who sprang up on the window ledge, with a low crooning purr, among the red geraniums in the sun.

A hand fell softly on Dorothea's shoulder, and she turned with a great start; but it was only Lettice, who had toiled after her with both bundles, and had come up noiseless behind, as her custom was.

"That's panic," she said, nodding towards the deserted table.

Room by room they explored the house; the kitchen with its vast open fireplace, the queer uneven stairs, the tiny bedrooms, so tempting with their carved bedsteads and spotless linen and scarlet wadded quilts ("je tiens à mes lits"—poor Madame!), their white-washed walls and deep-set lattices framed in jasmine; the round tower, dark save for the swords of sunshine that pierced its western loopholes, and rustling with fowls; the well-filled storeroom. Everything was there but the owners. They had heard a bruit and a rumor, and they had fled; had stampeded in abject terror before the advance of Germany. And so lonely was the farm, hidden in woods and served only by a cart track, that neither ravager nor refugee had found it. The wanderers sank into its deep peace and slept.

It could not hope to escape permanently, however, for Germans work by the map; so on Dorothea's advice the first thing they did next morning was to make a cache of provisions in the orchard. Well for them they thought of it, for that every afternoon they were visited by a wandering party of Uhlans. Dorothea, washing her skirt in the yard, heard

them coming, and had just time to escape with Lettice to the woods. There being nobody to kill, the visitors had to content themselves with sacking the house, which they did with zest. It was odd to see chairs and mirrors come hurtling out of the bedroom windows, odder still to see a drunken Uhlan parading about in Madame's voluminous best chemise. They wrung the necks of the fowls; they drove off the two mild cows; they set fire to the ricks, and tried to burn the house as well, but luckily they had no petrol, this being a private venture not a military operation, and its massy walls defied them. It was not the first time they had stood fire. Finally, they killed the sandy cat, who was misguided enough to greet them as she greeted Dorothea. She had been a lean, hard-flanked, and indiscriminatingly amiable creature, with a vulgar loud purr; still, it was distressing to see her tied to a tree and shot to death with table-knives.

After this they rode off, singing the inevitable *Deutschland über Alles* with more noise than melody, and the girls came out of hiding to take stock of the damage. It was extensive. The German soldier had by that time learned to loot effectually, and what they had not stolen they had smashed. The poor pretty garden was trampled into mire. The kitchen was ankle-deep in broken crockery. A half-killed pig was squealing its life out in the passage. The mattresses had been slit open and spread with filth from the stable. They had wiped their boots on the tablecloth; they had used the coffee-pot as a spittoon; they had covered the white-washed walls with what the expressive French idiom calls *des saletés*; they had done other things which need not be described. In fine, they had contrived, within the space of a summer afternoon, to be so ingeniously filthy and destructive that not a corner of the house was habitable.

Lettice and Dorothea camped that night in the barn. Next day, while trying to cleanse their pigsty, they were surprised by a fresh party of visitors; but these were sober, and the officer in command was the same comparatively humane person who had burned the Bellevue. His mission now was not to strike terror, but to make an inventory of

all domestic animals; and he did not look pleased when he fell over the dead porker in the passage. Hastily suppressing Lettice, who remained impracticably hostile, Dorothea made her appeal to the honor of the German army. She used her tongue and her beautiful eyes so well that, after listening to her tale, the officer gave her what she wanted — a sort of *permis de séjour*, exempting the farm from further requisitions. Indeed there was little left to take.

After this they had peace, and settled down to a strange, precarious, isolated life. For some weeks they hardly set foot outside the farm. This extreme seclusion was not really necessary; for times had changed and the policy of the conquerors now was not to scare the country folk away, but to coax them back to their homes and their ordinary work. The German reign of terror in Belgium seems to have been based on the theory that one German soldier is worth x Belgian civilians. Therefore when sniping took place (or when they fancied it had taken place, or feared it might take place, or thought a locality needed a lesson to teach them what to expect if it did take place) the order went out to kill. "Without distinction of persons, the innocent will suffer with the guilty." Much of the ravaging was done deliberately, by order: as at the sack of Rochehaut. Much was done by an equally deliberate relaxation of orders: as at the cottage in the woods. In part the German plan succeeded, for it certainly stamped out sniping. In part it recoiled upon itself. To strike terror is a very fine thing, but the results may be embarrassing to an army of occupation. Besides, it really looked so very bad to neutrals!

Lettice and Dorothea, however, did not concern themselves with this change of policy. The cottage in the woods had cured them of any wish to wander. Even Dorothea had had her fill of adventures. It was long before she ventured as far as Poupehan, to ask for news; and when she did, she wished she had stayed at home. The fall of Namur, the fall of Brussels, the coming fall of Paris — how long before they heard of the capitulation of London?

CHAPTER XXX

CONFESSIO AMANTIS

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow . . .
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of the perilous stuff
That weighs upon the heart.

Macbeth.

Not so very many miles from Rochehaut, in an empty loft, Denis was studying a map spread out on a packing-case. On the other side of their table Wandesforde sat writing a letter on his knee. Partly by good luck, and partly because Wandesforde was an expert in the art later known as wangling things, they had contrived to keep together almost from the first; at present they were in the same squadron, and sharing the same billet, much to Denis's advantage. For Wandesforde, wherever he was, on the principle of the conservation of energy, drove at making himself comfortable. He used to say that Denis would have put up in a pigsty without troubling to turn out the pig. Two months of war had made them more intimate than five years at Bredon.

"And that's that," said Wandesforde, licking the flap of his envelope. He got up and stretched himself. "Ho! I'm tired. I think I shall turn in. Four-thirty to-morrow, isn't it? Ungodly hour to rout you out on a chilly morning!"

"Been writin' home?" asked Denis without looking up.

"Yes. Haven't you?"

"Haven't any one to write to."

"Well, I rather wish I hadn't either," said Wandesforde. He looked over Denis's shoulder. "What are you studying that for?"

"Reasons."

"Want to make sure whereabouts Aix is?"

"No," said Denis. "Ever flown over this bit of country?"

Wandesforde bent lower to follow his finger on the map. "What's the name of this bloomin' corkscrew? The Semois? No, I can't say I have. Not much doing that way, is there?"

"Not as a rule. But we shall be pretty near it to-morrow."

Wandesforde, in the act of lighting one of his big cigars, looked inquiringly at his partner. He knew next to nothing of Denis's private affairs, and on principle he never asked, but he was always open to hear. Denis lay back with his long legs outstretched.

"I may as well tell you," he said with deliberation, "if my bus comes to grief to-morrow, as I rather expect it may, that's the place I'm goin' to make for."

"You expect your bus to come to grief? Been drilling holes in the tank, what?" Denis made no reply. "Oh, Lord! is it one of your rotten presentiments?"

"I was dreamin' of muddy water last night," said Denis with a slightly defiant air.

"Well, turn that stinking lamp down, then. Lord only knows when I shall get the bath fixed, and I've worn these pyjamas a fortnight already, I can't afford to get 'em any blacker," said Wandesforde irrelevantly. "Have some cake. Home-made, best dripping and a bit sad in the middle. Specially recommended against presentiments. You won't? You don't know what's good. So you think you're going to glory to-morrow, do you? Bet you a fiver you don't."

"Done with that. If I lose, I'll not be called on to pay," said Denis, with a wintry smile. Wandesforde lay back in his comfortable bunk—he had swung himself a hammock made of curtains, and stuffed it with straw—and folded his arms under his head.

"Well, all I can suggest is you dream of a filter and square things up that way. I wouldn't like to go out yet. I want to bring down a Hun or two first. We shall be doing them in by dozens before we're through. Did I tell you I

ran into Tommy Wyatt yesterday? He was very full of a new French dodge for firing a machine gun through the propeller. Silly business to get killed when there's so much fun on hand, what? Think better of it, old thing."

"I never said I was goin' to get killed. I said my bus would come to grief, which is quite a different thing. It's not likely we shall both of us get back, is it? Bombing Zeppelin sheds isn't a healthy job. We're safe to get Archied; and from Aix it's an uncommonly long run home."

"You're in a cheerful mood to-night."

"Sorry. What I'm tryin' to drive into your thick head is that if I do have to come down, I shall make for Rochehaut."

"Of course if you've made up your mind to come down —"

"I've not made up my mind to come down. But I feel like it," said Denis obstinately.

"All right, all right. But I can't see how you think you'll ever get the chance of making for Rochehaut or whatever you call the place. An internment camp in the Fatherland is the common fate." Denis again preserved silence. "Oh, you and the bus are going to alight in some conveniently uninhabited spot? That the idea?"

"It's possible, isn't it?"

"You feel like it?" suggested Wandesforde, with a broad grin.

"Yes, I do feel like it. And it'll probably happen. I may be wrong but I never am," retorted Denis.

"Oh, quite. Well, I shouldn't dream of offering advice, because I know you never take it, but I wish to point out that in the hypothetical circumstances I should make for the Dutch frontier myself. You'll never get through the lines."

"I don't propose to get through the lines. If instead of scintillatin' with wit you'd ever by any chance allow me to finish what I'm saying, I should have told you before that I want to go to Rochehaut because I know the place, and because my cousin Lettice is there — if she's still alive."

"Oh ah. Yes. I remember."

Wandesforde had heard as much as that. He did not dare offer sympathy, because Denis's glacial eye was upon him, forbidding it. Denis went on with his most intransigent air: "And I may add that if I get the ghost of a chance to go I'm goin', and if I get into a row for it afterwards I *do not care*. I want you to know this now because, if things fall out as I expect, I shall be very much obliged if you'll see my pal Gardiner next time you're home on leave, and tell him."

"The chap that's in prison?"

"Yes. Sorry to put you to so much inconvenience, but I can't write it, because his letters are read."

"Quite. What do you want me to say?"

"Tell him I'm goin' to Rochehaut to look up Lettice. It's more his affair than mine." Wandesforde scribbled down the message in his pocket-book. "And tell him —" Denis's voice unexpectedly failed.

Wandesforde held his pencil ready.

"Say I've changed my mind, and I'm goin' to settle up my own affair too, if I'm let. He'll understand."

Wandesforde did not, never having heard of Dorothea in this connection. He had never known Denis make a confidence before. There was a pause; but he still waited. If he knew anything of the signs of the times, more was coming. He was right. The never-ceasing thunder of the guns accompanied and illustrated Denis's next speech.

"Wandesforde, do you believe in a future life?"

Three months earlier, Wandesforde would have answered with a shrug. His point of view had changed. "More or less got to out here, haven't you?" he said soberly.

"I didn't — for the best part of this year."

"What, that time you were playing about with the fair Evey?"

Denis lifted his head. "You knew? Well, I suppose you would. It never struck me —"

"Everybody knew, old thing," said Wandesforde, with an irrepressible grin. He was more touched than he would have

cared to admit by Denis's rather truculent confidences, but he could not for his life help finding him deuced funny! "And nobody could think what on earth you were after! It was so very much out of your line, and, if you'll forgive my saying so, you made such a shocking poor hand at it!"

"I don't lay claim to your experience," said Denis forbiddingly. He attacked his confessions once more. "I had rather a rough time of it last autumn, one way and another. I — it — I —"

"You lost your faith," suggested Wandesforde, still grinning. "Lord bless you, my dear chap, I know! You left off going to Bredon and listening to the little blighter with the mustachios. He came to me about it — funk'd you, I suppose — and I had to send him off with a flea in his ear. Oh, Denis, when you go off the rails all the world stands to admire. Nobody would make a song about it if I stopped going to church. And then Evey Byrne appeared on the scenes, and there was a hectic interlude which ended in your both vanishing. You went back to Bredon, I know that; but what on earth did you do with her?"

"She went into a convent."

"No! did she really? Rum ending to an affair of that kind."

"It was not an affair of that kind."

What an expressive face his was, when he was not on guard! and how it changed at mention of Mrs. Byrne! Wandesforde could not imagine himself taking Evey Byrne very seriously, but he felt like a bull in a china shop among the reserves and scruples and delicacies of his partner's mind. He was, quite simply, very fond of Denis. He disliked serious scenes; in candid truth, he dreaded them; they did not do, when to-morrow you were flying to Aix and to-night you had been writing cheerful non-committal letters like that now lying on the table. But it was evident that Denis was quite beyond ragging and being ragged. The moment had come, his tongue was loosed, and he must speak. Wandesforde touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Go ahead, old Denis. I'm off rotting."

Denis looked up, and Wandesforde to his consternation saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"Wandesforde, did you ever hurt a woman — badly?"

"No," said Wandesforde. "No, thank the Lord! that I never did."

"I have. Twice."

"You, Denis?"

"Oh, not that way. Worse, I think. I did the beastliest thing — it was an insult —"

"Evey Byrne you're talking of?"

"Yes. And for all return she — she came and kissed my hand. She said I was too good for her. After what I'd done! She — she loved me, Wandesforde. You can't think what it was like. It made me feel so sick —"

He made a long break.

"I saw after that I'd been on the wrong tack. There is a God, and He does direct things."

"Yes," assented Wandesforde.

"And of course that set me thinkin' of the other again. Lettice said I'd been hard on her. I didn't want to be hard — I'd no right to be hard on anybiddy. Especially not on another woman. But I didn't see how things could ever be as they were before. I thought about it a lot, but I couldn't get it straight. I am a duffer when it comes to people, you know. All that time, too, I was feeling pretty queer — a bit under the weather; I dare say I'd not got over the shock. It wasn't till the war came, till I realized she was out here in all this awful danger, that I might never see her again —"

Another long break.

"So now I'm goin' to her, if I'm let; and I think I shall be," Denis wound up simply.

Wandesforde was aware that he had been no more than a communicating channel between Denis and his friend in prison. He did not guess, Denis himself did not guess, that but for his interposition this chronicle of the heart, such as it was, would never have been told. Denis had tried to put it down on paper, and had not succeeded; still less

would he have succeeded by word of mouth. Gardiner knew too much, saw too much. Wandesforde was a neutral medium. It is often easier to confess to a stranger than to the friend of your bosom.

So Wandesforde, feeling shy, and a good deal more uncomfortable than Denis himself, put up his pencil and prepared to take counsel with his pillow.

"You're a rum chap, Denis," was his conclusion.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LUCKIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD

What's death? — You'll love me yet!

Pippa Passes.

"LETTICE, I've been down to Poupehan!"

Lettice was darning her stockings in the shade of the tower. Lettice would have darned her stockings on the Judgment Day. She suspended her work to look up, slowly, at Dorothea. Rose-brown, panting from the steep hill, lips laughing, eyes sparkling with excitement, she flung herself down among the stubble and the pink convolvuluses and fanned her face with her handkerchief.

"Oh, I'm so hot! I ran nearly the whole way. I went to try for a paper, and I fell over M. Lapouse, and oh, Lettice, what do you think he told me? There's been a French plane brought down near Florenville, and the pilot's escaped, and they're hunting him all over the place! Oh! don't you hope he'll get away?"

Lettice remained looking at her for a minute, then lowered her eyes and slowly resumed her work. Dorothea flounced away with an energy that upset Madame Hasquin's work-basket.

"Well, you *are* a fish! I did think you'd be interested in this. Don't you want to hear about it? Don't you *care*?"

"Was — was the man hurt?" asked Lettice.

"No, they don't think so, or not much — he managed to burn his machine, anyway. Oh! don't I wish I'd been there! We might have patched her up between us, and flown her to the French lines. Oh! it would have been sport!"

"It's, it's — it's twenty miles to Florenville, isn't it?"

Lettice pursued her train of thought in her own undeviating way.

"Yes, about. Why?"

"And when did it happen?"

"When did she come down, do you mean? Yesterday morning. Oh, were you thinking he might have come up here? He never would, Lettice. No such luck! He would make for the Dutch frontier, they always do, M. Lapouse was saying so. They're hardly even searching west of Bouillon."

"O-oh."

Lettice went on darning. Lettice in those days was hardly a personality. Withdrawn into herself, *ensimismada*, as Gardiner would have said, for hours on end she did not speak, she scarcely thought; she brooded. Her mind had been bruised and it was numb. She was like an automaton; the one definite feeling that emerged was an unwavering hostility to the destroyers of the Bellevue. Dorothea was compassionate to a fair young hussar who limped to the door one day after a fall from his horse; she gave him breakfast, put his sprained arm in a sling, and sent him on his way with good wishes in valiant German. Lettice made his coffee and broiled his ham—if thine enemy hunger, feed him; but he remained her enemy still. There were no good wishes from her.

Dorothea with an enormous sigh pulled over a bunch of stockings for a pillow, and lay back, still panting, hands clasped behind her head. She did not find Lettice a very satisfactory companion in those days. She was not an automaton, far from it! They had been at the farm for several weeks now, and she was wondering how much longer she could stand it. The same view, day after day—the steep down-slope of the meadow, the green velvet crease where the brook ran, the steep up-slope of the harvest field, silvery, with its slowly discoloring sheaves, the spires of the wood against the uneventful azure of the sky—oh dear! She wanted to fight, to defend her country, to stick bayonets into Germans, as they had stuck them into that dead girl

in the woods — as she had already stuck a knife into the Uhlan. She held up her little brown hand; it didn't seem possible, yet it was true, that that hand had accounted for one of the enemy, and she wasn't sorry, no, she couldn't feel one little bit ashamed, though she knew in her heart that at the moment when she pushed the body over the lip of the well she hadn't been quite sure that it wasn't still breathing. . . .

She tucked the hand back with a little shudder. That didn't bear thinking about. "Well, why didn't I stick a knife into Lieutenant Müller, then?" she reflected. Müller was the hussar. "There's no *sense* in me!" Hot and cold was Dorothea, Charlotte Corday one hour, Florence Nightingale the next. Inaction, presumably the woman's natural lot, was not natural to her. But for Lettice she would long ago have dressed up in one of Achilles's suits and made a dash for the French lines —

"'Tis but the coat of a page to borrow
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim —"

She didn't love skirts at the best of times —

"And I sit by his side, and laugh at sorrow —"

Denis. All her thoughts always came back to him.

Denis was fighting, and she wanted news; oh! she did want news so badly! Tears came hot in her eyes; she turned over and buried her face in the grass, struggling with the sudden pain. Denis was fighting; any one of these blue days he might be dying; he might be already dead. And he hadn't forgiven her. Oh! she, with this vulture at her heart, how could she sit quiet, brood on still anger, like Lettice? She must be white-washing the kitchen, or helping wounded Germans, or exciting herself over stranded French aeroplanes twenty miles away — anything, anything to get away from her thoughts!

"There's a man in the wood," observed Lettice.

She had dropped her work and sat immobile, her intent

gaze probing the shadows of the distant trees. Dorothea with an impatient sigh rolled over and sat up too.

"Where?"

"There, under that fir-tree — don't you see him? Now he, he, he's stooping down behind the bush."

"What eyes you have, Lettice!" said Dorothea, screwing up her own. "I can't see any old thing!"

"I've been watching him for some time. I think he's hiding."

"Hiding?"

"He was there before you came back, and then he got down out of sight. I don't think he can get away. I think he's hurt."

"Hurt?" Dorothea repeated wonderingly.

"There's been a lot of firing this morning down by the river."

"But, Lettice, you don't think —"

Lettice did not say she thought anything. She stuck her needle in her stocking and prepared to get up. She stood a moment shading her eyes, piercing the depths of the pine wood with her far-searching look, and then got under way to descend the hill. Dorothea seized her hand.

"Oh, don't, Lettice — it's sure to be some deserter, you know there are heaps, and you haven't even got your big scissors!"

"I am going to see if there are any mushrooms on the hill by the crucifix," said Lettice in the softly distinct tones which admitted no discussion.

"Well, wait half-a-minute for me, then!"

Lettice did not wait; when Dorothea came running out of the house with the carving-knife tucked inside her blouse, she was already at the white bridge over the brook. Dorothea overtook her half-way across the stubble field. She was making better time up the hill than ever she had before.

"Oh, darling Lettice, don't, don't go! Let me — it doesn't matter about me, I can take care of myself, and I don't mind things, but you know what it was to you last time! Lettice darling — *please!*"

Lettice shook off her hand. "I saw him again just now," she said. "He was wearing those leather overall things."

"Lettice!"

Next moment Dorothea loosed her hold on Lettice and ran on alone. She had seen him too.

He came out of the woods towards them, lurching like a drunkard. And Dorothea knew him, spite of disfiguring dust and blood, and his face—that face! His cheek had been sliced open; a flap of raw red flesh hung down over his jaw; his teeth showed white in the gap, like a skeleton's. He tried to wave back the girls, he tried to speak, a thick jumble of words; his feet dragged heavily together, and down he went, full length in the grass.

Dorothea was beside him. She nursed him against her breast, mourning over him with dove-like sounds, kissing away the blood, murmuring exquisite love, warding off friends and foes alike with jealous protecting arms.

Lettice knelt at a little distance, sobbing helplessly.

"Lettice!"

What radiant eager purpose! Here was the true Dorothea, come to her own at last, risen to her full stature.

"Help me to lift. They'll be up here directly, sure to, and we must hide him."

"The wood?"

"No, they'll search that first. Into the house. Take his feet; I can manage the head."

They could not have carried Denis—a six-foot man, in his heavy accouterments—they could not have raised him from the ground, in ordinary circumstances. But extraordinary need calls out extraordinary powers. One-half a man's strength is his conviction of strength. Dorothea lifted the man she loved with her love in addition to her muscles, and Lettice had the strength of endurance, if not that of passion. So they carried him across the bridge and laid him in the round tower among the hay. Dorothea spoke again.

"Get my first-aid things out of the dresser drawer, Lettice, while I see what's wrong. Quick as you can; we haven't a second to lose."

Lettice obeyed orders. When she came back Dorothea's uplifted face was sunshine unclouded.

"He's not going to die!" she cried, and her voice sang. "He isn't even dangerously hurt, it's only pain and loss of blood. And, Lettice, he's been telling me—darling, no; don't, don't try to talk, it does hurt you so—he's been telling me he's been bombing the Zeppelins at Aix! They got them, too, they set one on fire, and the other man got off safe; but Denis had a bullet through his tank. So he made for Rochehaut, but he couldn't get farther than Florenville, so he burnt his machine and came on on foot. And this morning he saw the Bellevue, and while he was asking about it he was seen, and they hunted him, all among the woods by the river, and he was hit, this"—she touched the cheek she was bandaging with thistle-down finger—"I wish I were a doctor, then I'd put some stitches in; it'll spoil your looks, my darling. Just think, Lettice, he was hiding in the wood, he could actually see us, but he never meant to come out for fear of getting us into a scrape. He meant to lie there till dusk and then get away—if they hadn't caught him first, which they would have. Watch how this bandage goes, you'll have to do it when I'm gone." She was working as she talked, with perfect swiftness and dexterity. "I wish, oh! I wish I could stay and see to you myself. Never mind, it can't be helped. Cover him up with the hay, Lettice—careful! don't crush it, or it'll give the show away. They may possibly look in here, for 'form's sake."

She stood up, struggling into the bloodstained coat she had taken from Denis. Lettice stared, bewildered.

"What—what are you going to do?"

"Lead them off on a false scent, of course," said Dorothea—"the Huns, I mean. Goodness, I shall never get my hair under this cap—where are your scissors?"

"But—"

Dorothea stamped, sawing at her thick plaits.

"They'll take me for him, don't you see? I'll lead them a lovely goose chase—I bet I know this country better than they do! There's the Grotte des Fées, if the worst

comes to the worst. They'll think he's gone off quite in the other direction — else, do you imagine we'd ever possibly be able to hide him, with the hue and cry there'd be? Good-by, darling, darling —” She flung herself down beside Denis, lavishing her whole heart on him, baring her soul, unveiling the holy of holies, the white fire of very love. Then, standing up, she held out both hands to Lettice; and in her face, unearthly bright yet grave, Lettice did visibly behold this mortal putting on immortality.

“It's — it's a frightful risk,” she said.

Dorothea's gravity broke up into a laugh of pure glee.

“Yes, that's the very cream of it!” she cried. “Oh! I *have* wanted to do something like a soldier, and now I've got the chance. Oh! and Denis has forgiven me, he's taken me back again — oh! I do think I'm the very luckiest girl in all the world!”

She caught Lettice close and kissed her vehemently, and then fled down the hill, buckling her cap as she ran.

CHAPTER XXXII

PER ARDUA AD ASTRA

Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.— ST. LUKE.

IN the days of her not far distant childhood Dorothea had never loved any game like hide-and-seek; she flung herself into her present escapade with much the same zest and little more discretion. Her plan, so far as she had one, was to lie up in the fir wood till a search-party appeared, then show herself and give them a lead away from the farm. The rest she left to chance, naïvely confident that the luck which had sent Denis to her would let her save him. She had had enough hard knocks, one might have thought, to convince her that Fate does not necessarily favor the young and hopeful; but that was a lesson Dorothea never had learned, and never would.

Ten minutes after she had settled herself among the bracken a mounted patrol rode over the brow of the opposite hill and began slowly to descend towards the farm. Dorothea scrambled to her feet and came to the edge of the wood; she began to crawl along under the hedge, stooping, furtive, a fugitive in every line. She expected every minute to hear the shout of discovery. None came, and presently she erected herself and peeped over the bracken to see if they were stealing upon her unawares. The officer in command was just riding through the orchard gate, on his way to the farm.

This was a contingency she had not foreseen — that they wouldn't notice her. Dorothea stamped. "Oh, you idiots!" she apostrophized the soldiers of the Fatherland. She ventured herself clear of the wood. Still her pursuers

went tranquilly the wrong way; they were half down the orchard — in another minute they would be knocking at the back door of the farm. Dorothea, in a fright now, ran right out into the middle of the field. Ah, at last! Some one shouted; the troop gathered itself together, swept past the farm, galloped down the hill.

Dorothea turned and ran like a hare. She felt like one, too. They were firing at her. They wanted to bring her down before she could take cover. It wasn't believable. She couldn't be hit! But she was; it fell like a lash on her shoulder, rolling her over with the sudden shock. She was up in a minute and ran on again, crying as she went, poor little Dorothea, with the unexpected sharp pain, mortally terrified of the bullets flying past her and of the thundering hoofs behind, beginning to feel she had undertaken more than she could carry through. This wasn't a bit what she had expected — it wasn't any fun at all!

But the wood received her, and she knew its alleys better than they did; and presently she was tumbling head first into a tiny dell, under a low cliff veiled in ivy and drooping ferns. You might search the wood from end to end without finding the way into the dell; and if you found the dell, you would never guess that under the creepers there was a hole, the entrance of the *Grotte des Fées*. Dorothea had once tried to explore it; she got as far as a first chamber of exquisite white veils and icicles of stalactite, and then dropped her candle. She never tried again, because Madame Hasquin assured her the roof was unsafe. She was rather glad of the excuse; underground adventures were not to her taste. She crept inside now, but not far, not beyond the green light of the entrance.

For some time she lay panting like a dog, thought foundered in panic; but she gradually calmed down. She had a drink from the stream trickling down the cave, and by and by, feeling a good deal ashamed of herself, she made an effort, opened her coat and examined her wound. It was neither wide nor deep; the bullet had gone clean through her arm without touching the bone. But it had bled a good deal,

and it hurt, it hurt dreadfully. She made shift to tie it up, feeling more ashamed than ever because she couldn't help whimpering with the pain. Oh, she was a horrid little coward! She had come down with a bump from her vain-glory. But when it was done she took heart. She looked down on her stained sleeve; how splendid to see her blood mingling with Denis's! After all, she was a real casualty now; she had been really properly wounded, like a real proper soldier. That was a sustaining thought.

It was while she lay there, listening to the cool drip of the water, breathing in the cool mossy scent, that her active little brain got to work on the position. She had gone into it headlong, without thinking; she now saw many things she had ignored. First and foremost and at any cost, she must not allow herself to be caught. She was tall for a woman, and Denis slight for a man, and she had put on his leather coat and leggings over all her own things, but even so there was a good deal more of them, both lengthways and breadthways, than she could fill out. "Gracious! why, my wig alone would give the show away!" reflected Dorothea, with a dismaying vision of hidden dangers passed. "Besides, they would recognize me — Major von Marwitz would, I think, and Lieutenant Müller would, I know. And then, of course, they'd go straight and search the farm, and Denis without his kit, they'd shoot him as a spy, and Lettice too for hiding him — oh!" She had a moment of panic. "But I'm not going to be caught," she wound up firmly.

A plan suggested itself. She would stay here till dusk, then get away through the woods towards Vresse, say, show herself there, double back to the cave, leave Denis's things under the rocks, and emerge as her proper self once more. She had everything but her skirt, and it wouldn't be the first time Dot O'Connor had run about in knickerbockers. This was a beautiful scheme, and it would let her go back to the farm — she did want to go back to the farm. A dimple came in her brown cheek; her color rose; at that moment Dorothea did not look much like an escaped airman. . . . Dreaming such nonsense! She lifted the creepers reso-

lutely and peeped out. Yes, it was already pretty dark, she might start now — and suddenly she discovered that she didn't, no, she didn't want to leave the safe shelter of the cave and adventure herself in a world where bullets were flying and men hunting for her life — "Oh, Dot O'Connor, you miserable little *worm!*" said Dorothea. "It's just what people always say — women are no good when it comes to the point. But I *will* be some good!" She marched out of the cave.

They were still beating the wood; there were soldiers everywhere. But Dorothea had been a Red Indian many times in the shrubbery at home. She lay in the brake not ten yards from Lieutenant Müller (yes, it was he in person), and laughed to hear him issuing his curt, disappointed orders. It was dark, and the men were bored, and not very numerous; she slipped between the cordon like a weasel, and had reached the next hill when by accidental good luck she showed herself against the sky-line. A sentry gave the alarm, and again she had the whole patrol streaming in pursuit. This suited her to a T, for she was drawing them away from the farm, and she was not in the least afraid of being caught. It was black as a wolf's mouth, and she knew the woods between here and Vresse like the palm of her hand. She had her second wind of courage now.

Somewhere about two in the morning she found herself — not at Vresse, but at Mogimont, in a totally different direction. It didn't matter, for it was miles away from Rochehaut, which was all she cared about; but in her ignorance of her whereabouts she nearly blundered into the tiny station, where a melancholy middle-aged German was brewing himself coffee. Beating a hasty retreat, she found a haystack in a corner of a meadow, and climbed into its warm depths to wait for the dawn. *Imprimis*, she had not yet showed herself at Mogimont, and she must; *secundis*, after her recent performance she wouldn't trust herself in the dark to find the way back to the farm. She was extremely tired (Dorothea liked a good eleven hours in her bed), and she fell fast asleep. The sun was high when she was aroused

by the shaking of her couch. She opened drowsy eyes, to see the top of a ladder pushing itself up against the sky; a moment later she was gazing into the round astonished eyes and open mouth of the Landsturm sentry, who had come to fetch a truss of hay.

Dorothea had meant to show herself, but not at such close quarters. She hurled herself upon him and tipped his ladder over. He fell off, she slipped down the other side of the stack and made for the woods. Luckily she had only a few yards to cover. She was plunging through the hedge as her adversary turned the corner of the stack. He fired, and missed; out of the station rushed his comrades at the shot; down the hill through the woods fled Dorothea, laughing — yes — laughing; his expression had been so funny!

It was a close shave, nevertheless. She was up an oak-tree, flattened against the trunk, when the pursuit went past, and there she stayed until the alarm died away in another direction. She would have stayed longer; but when the world turned to black mist and began to spin round her she slid down as fast as she could, and ended by rolling out of the lower branches. When she came to herself she was lying at the foot of the tree in a pool of blood, ten feet from a path, at the mercy of any chance wayfarer. Her arm had broken out bleeding again; she was parched with thirst and felt like death. It was thirst which at last spurred her to her feet, in the hope of finding water. And in that land of brooks and springs she did find it — a tiny runnel, tasting of the brown leaves through which it oozed, but water of life to Dorothea with the wound-thirst on her. She drank and drank, and laved her head and face and arms, and drank again, till the sky stood still, and the trees left off dancing jigs before her eyes.

But she had lost a good deal of blood; she was weak, and feverish, and muddle-headed; and in consequence she made a blunder. She ought now to have stripped off Denis's things, which had served their turn, and left them hidden. But she had got into her head that she was to take them

back to the cave, and she had not wits enough to mend her plan; she could only carry out what was fixed before.

All that day, then, she toiled along, still in the character of the escaped *avion*. But the forests of the Semois are lonely; she met no one but a couple of children picking whortleberries, who dropped their cans and their dinner and fled, taking her for a German. Dorothea shuddered at the bread; she tried a few berries, but they made her sick. She could not eat that day, but she drank of every brook she came across. It was very hot, and Denis's coat and cap and leggings were made of leather and lined with fleece, and their dark color attracted an Egyptian plague of flies. Dorothea was far spent by the time she struck the familiar track through the pine wood.

She was so far spent that for some time she walked along the track itself, forgetting it was no place for her. It seemed too much trouble, too much, to stoop and crawl and hide among the bracken. When a bramble caught her sleeve she burst out crying. She missed her way and stumbled into the hidden dell from the wrong side, brushing waist-high through flowering willow-herb which streamed down the hill-side, rose-pink, almost lilac in intensity of color.

Oh! the coolness, the green twilight of the cave! Dorothea with a great sigh buried her face in icy crystal water. Oh! it was good! She lay for some time before she discovered that one reason why she had been feeling so queer was that her arm was bleeding again. She gave a twist to her bandage, but she was too tired to see to it properly — too tired even to get rid of her flying kit; a deadly lassitude weighed on every limb. By and by, when it was cooler, and darker, and the flies were less troublesome, she would slip off down to the farm.

"This is where he went," said an eager voice. "See how he has broken these pink weeds! And here is the blood again."

"Himmel! I have passed this tree ten times, and never have I seen this path! But what is become of him? He cannot have flown out of the place!"

Dorothea sat up; she was cold enough now. Oh! why had she not thought of the wood being still patrolled?

Steps came swishing through the long grass. Suddenly the cave grew lighter, and there was a startled exclamation. They had lifted the curtain of ivy. Both began to chatter at once, rapidly, excitedly. "I tell you, it is not safe, these caves are dangerous!" "Aber, if we fetch the Herr Lieutenant he will not give us the reward, we shall have to share with the rest!" Private Blum had a young lady in Germany, and he wanted all he could get. Dorothea could not follow all their talk, but she gathered to her joy that one was going off to fetch help while the other stayed on guard. Yes, he was certainly alone; she could hear him walking up and down and singing to himself — "Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten —" Now, with any luck —

The song ceased. The ivy was lifted again.

"Englishman!" Pause. "Englishman, are you there? Do you hear me? If you will come out you shall have your life — I will not harm you!"

Private Blum had a mind to steal a march on his comrade. Getting no reply, he went head first into the hole on hands and knees, his rifle tucked under his arm. It was very dark and very wet, and disagreeable stories about underground rivers and bottomless abysses were running in his head. He paused. "Englishman!" he called again less confidently.

This time there was a reply; a shot came out of the dark. He seized his rifle and returned the compliment; then, feeling what seemed like the entire grotto tumbling about his ears, he backed out hurriedly. "Du lieber Gott!" he muttered, standing up in the sunshine and feeling himself all over to make sure he was not hurt, "but that is a dangerous one! I will leave him to the Herr Lieutenant — he will know how to settle him!"

The luck was all with the enemy. Dorothea lay weeping tears of rage over Denis's useless revolver. She had dropped it into the stream; she had never let one off before, she had no idea they kicked like that! And now what was she to do? If she could have disposed of Private Blum, as she had

hoped, she might have got away; but she had not disposed of Private Blum. He was out there, very much alive, and in another minute Lieutenant Müller would join him; and if Lieutenant Müller saw her —

Till this minute Dorothea had never doubted of success. But now? Dead or alive, if she fell into German hands, it would be equally fatal; Denis would be worse off than if she had never interfered. He might even owe his death to her. "Oh, darling, darling!" Dorothea murmured, crushing her hands together, an agonizing stricture at her heart. "Oh, it isn't fair. Oh, God, let me save him! Oh, I must save him, I can't *bear* it if he dies through me, I can't, I can't, I *can't*. Oh, isn't there any, *any* way?"

Pieces of rock, loosened by the explosion, were still pattering down; one fell on her hand. She glanced round impatiently, and saw to her dismay that half the cave seemed ready to fall in; very little more would bring down an avalanche. She sprang to her feet — and stood still. She had seen how to save Denis.

So simple, after all! Why, of course it was what always happened, in the ordinary course of operations. So much neater, too, than if she had escaped. The search would come to an end, the roads would no longer be guarded, Denis would have a far better chance of getting off. And there would certainly be nothing left to identify. Oh, it was a toping idea! Perhaps if Denis crossed the frontier into Holland she might follow — no, she couldn't, though, she was forgetting; how queer! She would be dead.

Death. She was going to die, all alone here in the dark. She would never see the sunshine any more. She would never see Denis any more, never be his wife, never taste the happiness which niggard Fate, at long last, was offering her. It was the end. And while she was trying to subdue her aching, unsatisfied rebellion, to remind herself that she had only petitioned to be allowed to save him and should be thankful, in a flash of sunset light which illumined and interpreted the past, Dorothea saw that it was the only perfect end. She would have been his wife? Ah, but it would

never have been the same, he would never have given her what he once gave; she had spoiled that. It would have been pity, amends, the second best. He would never, never love her living; no, but he would love her dead. For her sake he would go softly all his days; she was sure, now, of an unfading shrine in his memory. Yes, and even apart from Denis, little Dorothea was shyly proud. She was not giving her life for him alone; she was dying as a soldier for her country, and could claim the soldier's due of amnesty and an honored grave.

How far away the world had gone! and how dim and queer she felt! Was it her arm again? Those moments of waiting might have been very cruel, but, more lucky in her death than in her life, Dorothea was spared them. She did not hear Lieutenant Müller outside, nor his orders to the men. She had drifted far away, to happy hours at Bredon and her beloved aeroplane. It was evening; the solemn splendors of the sunset were all about her in the sky. She was flying through a sea of gold — of pure gold, like unto clear glass — or was it the glory of God?

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE ONE SHALL BE TAKEN

If only the dead could find out when
To come back and be forgiven!

OWEN MEREDITH.

"ARE your minds set upon righteousness, O ye congregation?" inquired Mr. Roche in skeptical tones.

It was Sunday morning, and all prisoners having the white Church of England ticket on their doors had been rounded up for the chapel. Not that that was any hardship, for they liked the service; it was commendably short, there were plenty of hymns, and even the lessons, as read by Dr. Scott in his voice of gold, were really quite amusing, especially the *chroniques scandaleuses* of the Old Testament. By contrast with the bareness of their cells they liked, too, the satins and the embroideries, the lights and the flowers and the incense on which the little doctor squandered most of his pocket-money. He was a believer in the beauty of holiness; he had transformed the bare little barn of a place into a gem. Only the jeweled cross and candlesticks, source of covetous desires in such members of the congregation as did not happen to be set upon righteousness, had been a thank-offering from another donor.

"Psalm 126, the first verse. 'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion —'"

By way of prelude to this boldly hopeful text, Mr. Roche had just announced the fall of Antwerp. Scott did not love the new chaplain, but he could not deny that he preached well, or that he got hold of the men. The atmosphere of the chapel was not as a rule what one might call devotional, but this morning there was a fullness in the responses and a

clean-cut hush during the sermon which rather touchingly reflected the general state of feeling. It was hard in 1914 to be a prisoner, since even criminals may love their country. Several of Scott's patients had proclaimed their intention of enlisting the moment they were free. As months, or even years, had to elapse before that happy time, these protestations were cheap and safe. Others, who said less, perhaps felt more. Scott had been sorry for many, leashed in by their punishment; for none more than B14.

"Con — found — their — pol — itics,
Frus — trate — their — knav — ish tricks —"

The National Anthem having been roared out from throats kept artificially silent during the week, chapel was dismissed, and it was the immediate duty of the medical officer to take the casual sick. Scott made a rush to his house for a glance at *The Observer*, which did not reach Westby till midday, and was back in the casualty room by a quarter to twelve. He stood at a desk, with Mackenzie, as chief warder, beside him, and a table covered with pills, potions, and ointments ready to hand. One by one, as their names were called, the patients came up for treatment.

"Mason A29, sir."

Mason advanced, a doleful wisp of a man. "Well, Mason, what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, if you please, sir, I've got such a dreadful cold in my head!" A fruity and exhaustive sniff lent point to the complaint.

"A cold in the head, have you? Give me your hand. Now let's see your tongue. H'm! Dose of No. 7."

No. 7 was poured out, Mason choked over it, and was passed out by the opposite door. "Next," said Scott.

"Gardiner B14, sir."

This was unexpected. Gardiner B14 stood cheerfully submissive, nursing his hand, which was wrapped in his clean Sunday handkerchief.

"Hullo, you in the wars again? What's the matter now, hey?"

"Bad thumb, sir," said Gardiner, gingerly unrolling it. Yes, his hand had broken out again. "I shall have to lance this," snapped Scott, and did so, with inward ruth. After twenty years of practice, he still hated inflicting pain. "What have you been doing to yourself? Why didn't you come to me before?"

"Well, sir, I never thought twice about it till this morning. I knocked it on a nail; I thought it would get all right."

"Get all right? Get all wrong! Your blood must be in a shocking state. Ever have anything of this sort before you came here?"

"N-no, I don't know that I have. I expect perhaps it's the confinement; I'm not used to it, you know."

"H'm! well, your time's up next month, isn't it? and then you'll be free to get some war work, which is what you're fidgeting after, aren't you? Take care of that hand, and don't go jabbing nails into it, unless you want to lose it altogether. Two thousand men of the Naval Division have crossed the Dutch frontier and will have to be interned. Next."

BI4, with the faint suggestion of a smile, went the way of A29, and Scott looked after him with a sigh and the faint suggestion of a frown. Ever since his night in the padded cell it had been the same; Gardiner was polite, and even friendly, but he kept his distance. With no one is a reserved man more reserved than with the person before whom he has once been helplessly open. "I've lost him for good," Scott said to himself; and another sigh came, for he had not many friends. But he was right, it was irrevocable; Gardiner had definitively snapped the thread.

Sunday is a day of rest. Prisoners attend chapel twice, they have two separate hours of exercise, morning and afternoon; at half-past four they go to their cells for supper, and are then locked up for the night. In winter, all lights are put out. In summer, many read in bed. But on the brightest of June mornings Gardiner's cell was barely light enough for that; and by five o'clock in October it was as black as a cave. He had finished his supper, and was screw-

ing up his patience to endure the interminable night, when his door opened to admit that very welcome sight, a visitor — Mr. Roche the chaplain.

"I meant to get round before, but I haven't had a moment; I've been up to my eyes in business the whole day. But I thought I might just catch you before bed-time. How are you, eh?"

"Very well, thank you, sir. Very glad to see you." Gardiner's manner was an odd blend of orthodox respect and unorthodox friendliness. It had its counterpart in Roche's own: he could not quite shake off the condescension of the chaplain, yet he did not take possession of the prisoner's stool and leave him to stand. The consequence was that both kept their feet.

"To tell the truth, Gardiner, I've come to say good-by. I shan't have another chance; I'm off first thing to-morrow."

"Off on leave, sir?"

"Off for good. I'm leaving the prison. It's been in the air for some time, but it was only finally arranged last night. I've said nothing about it, because I didn't want a fuss; but I could not leave without seeing you."

"Thanks," said Gardiner, smiling. "You'll be missed. I'm glad my time's nearly up. Are you going to another prison, or is it an ordinary parish job?"

"Neither. I am joining up."

"Chaplain to the forces?"

"Better than that. I enlist." Gardiner's face, in the first moment of surprise, was more expressive than he could have wished. Roche, with his odd touch of the theatrical, laid a hand on his shoulder. "You envy me?" he asked, his voice thrilling and deepening. "Never mind, my poor fellow, your turn will come. Another month and you too will be free to do your bit with the best of us. In the service of your country there is no respect of persons —"

The hand was vigorously shaken off, and Gardiner stepped back. "I'll be shot if I'm going to let you patronize me! If you think that because you happen to be the Honorable and Reverend Dalrymple-Roche, and I'm B14 — Why, I

was round the world and back again before you were out of your schoolroom!" He burst out laughing.

"Gardiner —"

"No, no, wait a bit; let me finish what I've got to say, now I've begun. I've had it on my mind for some time; I meant to save it up for when I got out, but as it seems I shan't have the chance then I'll do it now. You've been very decent to me, and you've kept me going through a rather beastly time, and I don't forget that, and I don't want to let it all lapse, and I rather think you don't either; but I won't be patronized. I may be in prison, but I've done nothing I'm ashamed of, and I do not consider myself disgraced. Got that?" The words were not bluff, they were plain truth; very telling was his vigorous independence. "Well, then, if I pay you deference here it's because discipline has to be maintained, and incidentally because I should get it hot if I didn't. For that reason, and for no other; certainly not because I feel deferential. Deferential! You wait till you've cut your wisdom teeth, my son, before you start preaching to me. There; I've done. You can report me if you like — sir."

Roche had colored up; he looked very haughty and very angry. "I think you forget yourself," he began, and then his mobile face changed. "I beg your pardon, Gardiner; you are perfectly right. I have no business to patronize you. I don't mean to do it; but it's the more or less official manner, and one slips into it — to tell the truth, that's one reason why I want to get away."

"Oh, that's all right, lots of parsons have a turn for magniloquence," said Gardiner, with a laugh, "and if you do it again I shall tell you again, that's all. You inevitably will. And so you mean to enlist? Ho ho!" His smile broadened as he ran his eye over Roche's handsome figure. He did not say, "You won't like that, my friend," but he thought it.

"The French priests take their places in the ranks," said Roche, "why not we? I put that to my bishop. He refused to release me. One must act on one's own conscience

in these matters. I am a priest, it is my duty to lead men; when peace comes, how can I expect them to follow me, if during the war I have been skulking behind my cloth here in England? I would not follow such a man. If the clergy shirk now, they will be digging the Church's grave."

"Very sound sentiments. I have an old daddy, and if he were thirty years younger — thank goodness he isn't, for he'd certainly get shot. Well, I congratulate you. Mind my finger, I'm still rather frail." Roche had wrung his hand with more fervor than discretion. "Funny beggar you are!" Gardiner added, with the laugh in his eyes that was often there when he talked to Roche. "*You* won't get shot. Bet you what you like you come out with the V.C.!"

"Priests don't bet."

"Privates do, though. Not that you'll stay a private. You'll be offered a commission —"

"I shan't accept it," Roche declared.

"More fool you, then, for you're just the sort they want. You lucky beggar — oh, you lucky beggar!"

The hunger of envy peeped out. Roche, at times self-absorbed and blind, had at other times an Irish quickness of perception.

"Gardiner — I'm sorry! Perhaps after all, if a competent surgeon sees your hand, instead of that wretched little saw-bones —"

"Oh, that's all right, I shall get my whack by and by, even if I can't go into the trenches. Which reminds me: you won't forget to put through that little bit of business I asked you about, will you? (There's old Busy Bee locking up for the night, you'll have to clear out in two twos.) Just a word of introduction to Lord Ronayne, that's all I want. You see a criminal just out of jail does need some sort of sponsor." Gardiner's grin was quite free from bitterness.

"I won't forget," said Roche hurriedly, "I hadn't forgotten. I can answer for my father. Good-by, Gardiner — God bless you!"

Again he wrung the prisoner's hand, and again left him

laughing and swearing and shaking his fingers — a characteristic farewell.

Chim-chime. Chim-chime. Chim-chime. A quarter to five. St. Agnes' clock was striking as Roche came out into the lilac and gold of the October sunset, which lightened and broadened down the clean deserted streets, and glittered like tongues of fire in all the western windows. The trees in the square were brilliant, gold lace over iron filigree. Beyond them three tall chimneys stood, slender, black, and tapering against the cornflower-blue of distant hills. A train, just arrived in the station, was veiling itself in snowy mist, sun-smitten; and as Roche turned into the High Street St. Agnes' bells began to play *The King of Love*, merry and clear, a sweet little rocking tune in triplets. How bright the town was, and how peaceful in its Sunday rest! Not a soul was about, except the half-dozen travelers from the train; one of these, a tall man in the then unfamiliar uniform of the Royal Flying Corps, stopped to ask Roche the way to the prison.

In B14's cell it was already night. There was no sunshine here, not even light enough for him to throw his shoe at the blackbeetle which had crawled up the hot-water pipes, and was running about on the concrete floor. Gardiner lay on his back, hands clasped behind his head, staring at the gray oblong of his window, and wondering how he was going to get through the thirteen hours of darkness. He was not laughing now. He would have given twenty pounds for a candle and a book to read, fifty for a cigarette — he might as well have offered to buy the moon.

In the padded cell he had touched bottom; nothing could ever be so bad again as the days before that night, in their agony of impotence, or the night itself, in its agony of despair. Prison — it was a tedious business, no doubt, but what of that? He could only wonder why he had ever made a fuss about such a trifle. He had grappled with his bogey, and behold it turned out to be only a turnip-lantern ghost after all. Difficulties, once surmounted, have a way of

sinking back and effacing themselves in the past ; absorbed in a greater trouble, Gardiner did not realize that he had at last fought and won the battle, long impending, which made him master of himself.

He did believe, from the first he had never doubted, that Lettice was dead. Wandesforde's message, which he faithfully delivered in person, had not shaken that conviction. It had only made him feel that Denis was dead too. Yes, they were both gone ; but Gardiner no longer held himself responsible. That dreadful crazy feeling of guilt, which his sanity, half insane, had used to save him from himself, had passed with the crisis it provoked. He had not killed her ; yet she was dead, and he missed her more instead of less every day ; every day he came upon fresh tracts of his mind marked broad with her mark, and saw with dismay the widening scope of his loss. But no one knew of it, and no one was going to know, through him. " Not that anybody would be particularly interested," he reflected. " My dear daddy — he would, bless his heart, but he'll never see, and I shall never tell him ; he'd get the shock of his life to think I was old enough to want to get married. Married ! Oh, my Lord, I wish I had married her ; I could have stood it better now if I'd ever had one ounce of satisfaction. . . . And besides daddy, who else ? Tom ? Roche ? I don't think ! " He laughed. " Little Scott, then — he'd be all agog, but he isn't going to have the chance, confound him ! I wish old Denis were here. I could have talked to him. He would have understood. He knew me pretty well, did Denis, after all these years. I wonder how I'm going to get on without him. ' Their soul was much discouraged because of the way. ' Hard going : that's what I'm to expect, I suppose, for the rest of my wanderings in this wilderness. . . . There was a lot of likeness between them at bottom. I expect that's why I feel as though I'd known her all my life and before I was born — I did know her, in him. But he would always try to hide his dear old head in a bag whenever I did anything to upset his little feelings, and she never did. Not she ! She'd go picking her way with her little lamp round all your

dark corners, inexorably showing you every cobweb and every speck of dust that her highness didn't approve, and all without a word spoken, just by the poise of that darling little head of hers and those inimitable hazel eyes — hazel? No, b' Jove! What was it she used to say? 'Weak Bovril, with little bits of carrot floating about' — oh, Lettice, Lettice! oh, why the devil did I let myself begin on this?"

He flung his arm across his eyes, as if he would have hidden his trouble even from himself. Blind instinct had first dragged him to Lettice, a straw in the current; he felt he needed her long before he knew he loved her. But love, and even passion, had come since, flooding in by back ways, filling him to the brim. He was tormented by his lost opportunities. "When I had her to myself there in Rochehaut, why didn't I make her marry me? She'd have done it if I'd put the screw on; you can get pretty well anything out of Lettice if she's only sorry enough for you. Or here in prison, why couldn't I have put my arm round that little waist of hers and taken a kiss? What would she have done if I had? Would she have had the impertinence to ruffle up all her pretty feathers and make believe to be affronted? Or could I have got right down through all her defenses to the very heart of her, and made her drop her lashes, and color, and — acknowledge me? I'd give my eyes to know, and I never shall, never. She had more reticences and reserves and evasions than any human being I have ever met. She was as delicate as the bloom on a butterfly. Angelita de mi corazón, I would have respected your little fads; you should have kept your fenced garden and your fountain sealed. I could have held your life in my hand and never closed my fingers on it — yes, I could; even that. I was your very true lover. I wonder, was it a bayonet —"

To this precipice Gardiner always came, sooner or later. We talk of unimaginable horrors; there were none he had not imagined. How do men live, with thoughts like these? God knows.

"B14, are ye waukin? Ye're to dress and come wi' me."

"Hullo! is that Mr. Mackenzie? What's up?"

"It's a veesitor for ye."

"A visitor at this time of night? Here's an exciting go! Who is it — an officer? Big man in the R.F.C.?"

Mackenzie shook his head. "I canna tell ye, for I havena seen him."

"Now I wonder what good you think you are?" said Gardiner, sitting up, laughing, blinking at the light. "Rousing me out of my beauty sleep! Yes, I beg your pardon, sir, and all that, but I'm coming out quite soon, you know. Hold the light, do you mind, and let me find my socks?"

He laughed in self-defense, and he asked questions for form's sake; but he knew all the time that this was his doom. Only an urgent messenger would have been admitted at this hour. It was Wandesforde, come to tell him how she had died. That thought went with him down the twilight passages, it stood sentinel before the yellow-glimmering door of the visitors' room. "Ye've half-an-hour," said Mackenzie in business-like tones as he turned the handle. Gardiner drew a long breath and walked through the specter into the room.

A long-legged officer stood up. Wandesforde? No. Oh, good God!

"She's safe," said Denis instantly. "Here, hold on, old man; it's all right!"

Gardiner was not all right; he was nearly fainting. By and by he found himself sitting in a chair, still gripping Denis with both hands, while Denis patted him gently on the back.

"She's all right," he kept repeating — wise Denis, to harp on the one thing that mattered. "Quite all right; quite safe. Gently does it. Better now, are you?"

Yes, Gardiner was better and he said so with decision. Denis withdrew to the other side of the table and sat smiling at him.

"We got back last night. We've been together all the time. Didn't Wandesforde tell you? I went first to the W.O. to report myself, and then straight on to get leave to see you. Even a Government department has bowels

these days. I wanted Lettice to come too, but she said she thought you'd rather not, so she's gone down to her own people in Kent. Rather rough luck on them all this time, what? She sent her love."

"Go on," said Gardiner, leaning back and composing himself to listen. "Begin at the beginning and go on to the end, then stop. Lord! I wish you'd asked the bowelful Home Office to let me have a smoke while you were about it. Anda, caballerito! Let's have the 'ole of the 'orrible details."

Denis launched into his tale. He began, as directed, with the raid on Aix, and his soft Irish tongue ran on fluently till he came to the Bellevue. "I can't tell you what it was like to see it, Harry. It's one thing to read about these things, safe here in England; but to see it—a place you've known —"

"A place you own," said Gardiner grimly. "Yes, that's what these beastly pacifists never seem to grasp. On a *toujours assez de force*—they'd sing a different song if it was their own *maux* instead of those of *autrui*. Poor old Bellevue. Well, I'll build it up again. Go ahead. What happened next?"

"Oh, well, of course I had to ask about it—them—I was a bit reckless, I suppose. I went down and hailed a man in the road. He told me they were safe at the Hasquins' farm. And so while we were talkin' of course a lot of beastly Boches came round the corner. I skipped like a young unicorn, I can tell you, but they potted me, and then they chased me all over the place. But I dodged 'em and got up into the fir wood. I wanted pretty badly to see for myself —"

Gardiner raised his eyebrows. "Bit risky, what?"

"Ah, but I never meant to show up. I was goin' to lie doggo and get off again after dark. It was Lettice spied me out—you know what her eyes are." Gardiner nodded. "I do blame myself," said Denis earnestly. "I'll never get over it; but I was bleedin' like a pig and a bit muzzy-headed. Well, there it was, anyway. I fainted, and they did what

they liked with me. They got me over and hid me in the tower. Remember the tower?"

Did Gardiner remember the tower? He remembered it so well, and saw Lettice beside it so vividly, that he fell silent, and let Denis tell the rest of his tale almost without question. They had stayed at the farm till Denis was fit to travel. Then, one wet evening, they set out to tramp across Belgium, he in Monsieur Hasquin's blouse and loose trousers, she in Madame's Sunday skirt. "She didn't like it one bit," said Denis, with a reminiscent smile. "Wanted to take her hair curlers in the bundle. Very annoyed with me because I wouldn't let her. It rankled for days." Denis in addition had his scarred face tied up to represent toothache. "We did look rather scalawags," he admitted. They lay up by day and walked by night, keeping mostly to the fields, and guiding themselves by Denis's pocket compass. Once the café where they were at supper was invaded by soldiers, who luckily took no notice of their ragged companions. Another time when they were sheltering in a barn some Brandenburgers came in to search for fodder. They did not search behind the patent reaper in the corner. Yet again they went to sleep in a copse, and woke to find they had chosen the exercising ground of a squadron of cavalry. That was near the Dutch frontier. Next night they crossed under cover of darkness, and were safe.

"Well, I consider it all most compromising for Lettice, and if you'd a spark of proper feeling you'd offer to marry her," said Gardiner, yawning with his arms above his head, "but of course you never think of that, selfish brute. Lord! I shall sleep like a pig to-night. Spoiled your beauty, Denis," he added, looking at the scar, red and puckered. Denis put up his hand to the place.

"That was our friend Fritz. He does sometimes score a bull's-eye."

"Well, it seriously detracts from your market value as a husband. On second thought, I'm not sure but Lettice had better put up with me after all." He hesitated. A point that had not escaped him was Denis's significant change of

pronoun in the latter part of his narrative from "they" to "she." What in the world had they done with Dorothea? Left her behind at the farm? Anything was possible with that dear lunatic! He had no thought of tragedy. There seemed no room for it in Denis's straightforward tale, and no hint of it in his quiet, smiling manner. "I say, Denis, I've no wish to be indiscreet, and I'm not asking if I ought to hold my tongue—but Wandesforde said—"

"Yes," said Denis, "I was comin' to that. She died."

"Died!"

"Instead of me. I'd never have got off but for her. She put on my flying kit and led them away from the farm. She was always keen on dressin' up as a boy. Of course I'd have stopped it if I'd known, but I didn't; I was off my head. I can't tell you exactly what happened, but they shot her, and they hunted her, and finally they rounded her up in the fir wood. The officer in command was quite a decent boy, Lettice said; she'd have been all right if she'd given herself up. But that would have meant givin' me up, do you see, so she wouldn't do it. She crawled into one of those caves up there and refused to come out."

"Well?"

"They bombed her," said Denis simply. "Like clearin' a dug-out. So the whole place fell in. She must have counted on that. She knew it wasn't safe."

"That was pretty fine," said Gardiner under his breath. He could find nothing more. The contrast was too poignant. "The one shall be taken"—but Lettice was left.

"Yes," said Denis. "I've wondered, Harry: do you think there's anything in that Carth'lic idea of prayers for the dead?"

Gardiner, with those expectant dark blue eyes fixed on him in their inveterate simplicity, found himself answering: "Oh, I expect—"

"Because, you see, we didn't have much time to say things," Denis explained. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to bore you with this, but it's been rather a facer for me. You know, if she'd lived, she'd have been my wife."

"Oh, my dear old Denis—!" said Gardiner.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SHE ALONE CHARMETH MY SADNESS

Oh, believe me, Nell, it is an awful thing to be a wife.—**CHARLOTTE BRONTË.**

LETTICE, dragging up the steps of No. 33 Canning Street, paused to unfasten her waterproof and shake her wet umbrella. It was raining, it seemed to have been raining ever since she got back to town, chill November rain, a yellow haze down every street; and the weather matched her mood. Ever since April she had been trying to shut her eyes to the future, but as time drew on it refused to be ignored. It lay in wait outside the Museum, it came home with her in the Tube, it took possession of her attic, it was translating itself with appalling rapidity into the present, and she was no more ready for it than she had been months ago.

Well! she had still a week's grace, and anything might happen in a week. Lettice detached her mind with an effort, picked up a letter from the hall table, and came upstairs at a snail's pace, reading it. Her own room she expected to be dark, so with her usual deaf and blind absorption in anything to read she lingered outside on the landing. She became aware, as she stood, of another scent mingling with that of the lamp, of another clearer light than its brownish obscurity, but her eyes remained glued to her letter; not till she had reached the end did she slowly raise them from the sheet, and then she saw her door open, her room full of firelight, a white cloth gleaming, a dark figure standing in the entrance watching her with a smile.

"Buenas noches, señorita," said Gardiner, politely removing his cigarette.

"O-o-oh — it's you," said Lettice with striking originality.

"The curse is come upon me!" suggested Gardiner. His smile widened. "Exactly. You look so pleased!"

Lettice, after that first involuntary pause of dismay, had come into the room; she stood by the table, slowly, slowly drawing off her gloves.

"Well, of *course* I'm pleased; but why, why, why didn't you let me know? You said you weren't coming out till next week!"

"So sorry, but I didn't know myself. It was little Scott worked the oracle — said I was in a bad way or something." Lettice said nothing, but her chin had a mutinous cock. "Shall I go back again?"

"If you'd let me know in *time*," said Lettice, "I'd have got you something *nice* for tea. *Now* you'll have to put up with what there is."

That minute offended voice, that reproachful pianissimo drawl! Gardiner laughed out.

"Lettice, you're inimitable! I swear you haven't turned a hair! Do you know — do you know you've got the same button off the same coat?"

"Well, you wouldn't expect me to have the same button off another coat, would you?"

"I would not have you in any single particular in any degree different from what you are now," Gardiner declared. He dropped into a chair. "As a matter of fact, they shot me out yesterday; and if it comes to letting people know, I went straight off to Starbridge under the impression I should find you in the bosom of your family. I was shown in right on top of a Belgian work party. Awful. I came out again with my tail between my legs. That upset I couldn't even face you. I spent the night in the fields."

"It was raining."

"Quite; it was. I was under a tarpaulin on top of a stack. Oh yes, thanks, I slept like a hog. I've been dropping off at intervals ever since, in the train or any old place. Making up for lost time, I suppose."

His speech ended in a yawn. Lettice stole a glance at him out of the tail of her eye. "Were you sleeping badly right up to the end?" she asked.

"Yes; it's been rather rotten. Never mind, all over now. It's good to be out. Brrr! You leave that toasting fork alone. Drop it! My job. You're tired; you've been fagging all day in the B.M. Sientese usted, señorita."

"You'll burn it," cried Lettice, defensively holding on. He looked up lazily; his black eyes were melting soft, his voice a seductive murmur.

"Ah! prendita mía, don't you know I'm going to make your toast for you every evening of your life?"

Lettice was extinguished. She sat down, unwilling but unresisting. He could make toast, and he could do what was far more difficult and unusual — make her obey him. He spoke lightly, but he was watching her all the time; he beset her with his eyes. They said bold things, but he did not press them; he made her color, and he laughed, yet he did not touch her. Why he did it? That was quite plain; he was hoarding up his happiness, playing cat and mouse, holding her life in his hand, as he had sworn he could, without closing his fingers on it. Lettice knew not whether to be glad or sorry at the respite.

"Have you seen Mr. Gardiner yet?" she asked. She preferred talking to being watched.

"Not yet. I'm booked for Woodlands to-night, but I thought I'd see you first and present him with our plans ready made; he flurries himself over anything like a discussion, dear old boy. Bet you sixpence you don't guess what I mean to do?" Lettice looked inquiring. "No; not enlist. This hand does me out of that. But I've a job in my mind's eye that will do me quite as well or even better. What do you say to the Secret Service? Don't you dare screw your nose up at me!" He was laughing at her again. "Seriously, you know, I'm cut out for it. I pass anywhere as a Spaniard, and though I say it, I have quite a pretty turn for finesse. The padre at the prison, Roche his name was, has a father who's a big brass hat in that line, and he's giv-

ing me a leg up. I shall go directly I'm fit. I'm still pretty frail; I wouldn't trust myself not to leg it out of a tight place, which at best would be ignominious, and might lead to a handy wall and a firing squad — oh, wouldn't suit my book at all. No. I give myself a fat month. I've certain plans for that month which I propose presently to lay before you. You go raspberry-pink when you blush, Lætitia Jane; did you know it?"

"Will you have some more tea?" asked Lettice repressively.

"No, I will not have some more tea. No, and I won't have a cigarette either. You are a little liar, you hate smoke. I got that out of that pretty sister of yours — by the way, I think I can get round your people without much trouble; I'm rather a dog, you know, when I give my mind to it. Always well to be on good terms with your in-laws — but that's not the point at present. I've certain plans for this next month, as I said; but before we discuss them this house will go into committee on ways and means. The sad fact is that, bar a few pounds in the bank, I'm a blooming pauper. Every cent I possess went with the Bellevue. I suppose a grateful country will support me while I'm lying in the bosom of the Hun — What are you looking at me like that for?"

"Don't you know?"

"Know what?"

"About your, your — your what do you call it."

"My —?"

"It was in Denis's letter. I've just heard from him. About Dot O'Connor."

"Lucid, very," said Gardiner. "Get a move on, darling. Steady over the stones. What about Dot O'Connor?"

"Well, I'm *telling* you as fast as I can. You, you, you do hurry me so," Lettice complained. She took breath and tried again. "She, she — it was her will. You heard she left him a lot of money for his old aeroplanes?"

Gardiner nodded. "Yes, that was in *The Mail*. 'Bequest to an Airman.' Roche told me. I was very glad

about it; poor dear old chap, it'll be something to take his mind off. But I don't see —"

"Well, she's left you some too. To show her gratitude for your consideration."

"How much? *Five thousand?* Good Lord! I say, Lettice, I can't possibly take it!" Lettice was silent. "Don't you agree with me?"

"No. I think you should."

"After all that's happened?"

"Well, you never did hate her, did you?" said Lettice. "And she didn't hate you, at any rate not at the last. She'd be sorry if you refused."

"No, I never hated her," said Gardiner. He lay back, thinking. "I say, Lettice."

"Well?"

"I say, I was cut up over that business. Weren't you?" Lettice nodded. He leaned forward, fingering the fringe of her tea-cloth. "Not for Denis's sake, I don't mean, but for her own. I—I liked her, you know. You couldn't help feeling she ought to have been such a jolly kid!"

"I owe her a good deal," said Lettice on a rare impulse.

"You do?"

"She stuck a knife into a German for me."

Gardiner looked up quickly. "In time?"

"If it hadn't been I shouldn't be here," said Lettice very concisely.

"H'm," said Gardiner. His face was expressionless. Lettice wondered what he was thinking. She was apt to go astray in other people's thoughts where they concerned herself, because she habitually underrated her own significance. She wished she had not told him. She had never told Denis. She scourged herself for giving confidences unasked.

There came a pause. Gardiner seemed deep in thought. Lettice with a darkened face was noiselessly putting cups and saucers together. She hoped to get out of the room without attracting his attention, but he shot out of his chair in time to open the door.

"Where are you off to with those things?"

"It's Beatrice's afternoon out, and I'm going to carry them down into the basement," said Lettice in an uninviting hurry. She was afraid he would offer to come too, but he did not, nor did her tone provoke a smile.

"Hurry up back, then, I want to talk to you," was all he said.

Lettice did not hurry back; she stayed to wash up, a work of supererogation, found half-a-dozen other unnecessary things to do, loitered on the stairs, delayed on the landing. She had at last to force herself to the door against a reluctance like a pain; and then she halted on the threshold. He had fallen asleep.

Lettice crossed the floor with her soft, slow step and stood looking down on him. Awake, except for being thinner, he was not so much changed from his old self; asleep, he showed the ravages of the past twelvemonth — helplessly, openly. Lettice knew without being told that he hated to be watched in his sleep for that very reason, because he could not guard his secrets; yet he trusted himself unreservedly to her. He and his secrets were quite at her mercy. It was too much; he gave too much and he asked too much. So unlike Denis, who asked nothing, took things for granted, never criticized either himself or her! But this alert, restless, observant mind, for ever analyzing and appraising — how was she to cope with it? She felt like a mole dragged into the sunshine.

There was some affinity between them, and she had power over him — yes; but she did not want it. She only longed to creep back underground. She could give him friendship, she could even give him love of the quality she gave to Denis, provided he asked no more; if he did ask more, all her instincts bent away from him towards something very like hostility. What was she going to do, then? Keep her word, that of course; but how? Could she deceive him? She could not; that was just what she found intolerable. But if she did not, would he be satisfied? Or would he actually enjoy holding her against her will? Lettice was

not sure. He was not cruel, but he was passionate, and passion is cruel. He made her conscious, always, that he was a man. Entangled in the personal relation, her judgment was all astray.

Well! she supposed she must set her teeth and do the best she could. After all, the fault was hers, not his, the unnatural lack was in her. Remembering little Dorothea's free-hearted giving, Lettice despised her own sterility.

But there was a deeper affinity between them than she knew; and he showed it now by answering the call of her presence and waking under her eyes. He woke in terror, with her name on his lips, a cry of agony, which changed, when he saw her, to relief — instantaneous. He turned and hid his face against her, in the gesture of a frightened child. Lettice never forgot that moment. It was a sword through her heart. She drew a deep breath; without impulse, deliberately rather, she put her arm round his shoulders and held him there, strong to comfort. Her face was stern. . . . Moments passed; little by little the tremors and the quick uneven breathing subsided. He sat up.

"Apologies," he said with a half-laugh, unconcealably shaken, but unashamed.

"Do you often wake like that?" asked Lettice unsmiling.

"Do I? Occasionally. When I get the jim-jams. Yes, I have pretty often lately. It's all your fault, you know."

"My fault?"

"That story of yours, that particular danger — well, it happened to be my particular nightmare. I don't think there were many minutes when it was out of my head. I kept it under mostly during the day, but at night it used to wear through and wake me up. I used to visualize it in all sorts of variations. You, Lettice, who hate to have a hand laid on you —"

"Who told you I disliked that?"

"You have yourself, a dozen times."

She let that pass. "I am thankful you are out of that place," she said in a low voice, half to herself. He smiled.

"I'm all right, darling. Or I soon shall be, when —"

"When what?"

"Nothing," said Gardiner. "I shall be all right soon." He captured the hand which hung by her side and kissed it softly, inside and out. "It's been rather sport pulling your tail when you've always tried to pull mine, but I can't keep it up any longer. Are you going to give me what I want, Lettice of my heart?"

"What do you want?"

"You. All of you. Mind as well as body. Mind principally. I told you before, I tell you again, it was you brought me through. You have me—all of me. And if I'm better worth having than I was a year ago, it's your doing. I claim no credit. I put myself into your hands to do what you like with. Will you take on the job?" Lettice did not answer—could not answer; she was in travail, and hers was no easy delivery. Gardiner looked up. "My God, you don't want to!"

She put out her hand quickly. "I will marry you."

"No, you won't. I decline."

"You—you don't understand. I will marry you."

"Oh, damn," said Gardiner. "Oh, I can't stand this. It's quite all right. I can get on without you." He stood by the table, striking match after match in vain efforts to light his cigarette; when he had it burning, he threw it away. Then he began on the matches again; the floor was strewn with broken ends. "My darling, it really is all right. I should have seen it before if I hadn't been an ass. What you can't give is the least part of what I want. Put me on the same ration as Denis, and I shall do famously."

"You *don't* understand," said Lettice, "and I am such a dolt—"

"Lettice, I *will not* take what you don't want to give. I saw what you were feeling. Think you could take me in after we were married? Think I should enjoy the position? I tell you one reason why your instincts are rebelling now, and that's the—the—what that poor child killed. Isn't it so?" Lettice was mute. "Well, do you think I want to even myself with *that*?"

"I don't care what you think," said Lettice with staccato distinctness, "and I am *going* to marry you."

He turned and seized her shoulders. "Lettice, you don't love me?" She was dumb again. "Do you? *Do* you? Lettice — *alma de mi vida, niña de mi corazón* — *saladísima, preciosísima, hermosísima* —"

If he had never known it before, he saw now that he had power over her; she could not resist that tone. "Well, I can't have you waking up like that, can I?"

"How would you have me wake?" asked Gardiner under his breath. He did not know what he expected, certainly not what he got: a swift turn, Lettice's face grim with feeling, her hands strongly drawing him down against her heart. She said not a syllable, but she held him there; and by and by she bent her graceful little neck and kissed him, the oddest little salute, it might have been called a peck, quite definite and not at all shy. Gardiner sprang up, flushed, impassioned, freeing himself from her arms to seize her in his own; then holding her off, with one lingering scruple — "Sure it's all right, Lettice? Sure you don't mind? I swear I'll take nothing you don't freely give — now or as your husband, nothing!"

"You are not all there is of most intelligent, are you?" said Lettice.

But if her tongue was perverse, her eyes were very soft — soft as only Lettice's eyes could be, always with a sparkle in their sweetness; and Gardiner was not critical. He was far too much occupied in making love, which he did very prettily, with a wealth of soft Spanish superlatives. He was drunk with happiness; his most enterprising dreams had never pictured such a surrender.

And Lettice was happy too. She knew now, she had learned in the moment when he woke with her name on his lips, that she was not afraid of passion; and if she had surprised him, he had surprised her too. She had thought she understood him pretty well; but she knew the worst better than the best, and the unselfishness, the delicacy, the almost fantastic chivalry of his love left her wondering

and self-reproachful. So it happened that she finally surrendered the keys of her heart (with reserves: there were certain chambers which she really couldn't and wouldn't unlock, though she spoiled her Harry in every other conceivable way) with fewer regrets than she had thought possible, and with no misgivings at all. Her mind was at rest; she had built her house upon a rock.

*We traveled in the print of olden wars,
Yet all the land was green,
And love we found, and peace,
Where fire and war had been.*

MARCH, 1920, on the Semois.

Strong sunshine and silver rain-storms; the winds of the equinox marshaling great swan-white droves of cloud across the blue, the wet earth sparkling like a jewel. The hill of the crucifix was green, pea-green with the growth of young wheat; the hill of woods opposite, still leafless, had a million delicate buds, cloud on cloud of russet, and bronze, and lilac, and faint yellow, and fainter green, softly rounding the shape of every bush. Great oaks detached themselves, gnarled lichen-gray skeletons, distinct in branch and twig, from purple hollows of the woodland. The valley was a streak of emerald; the river glistened like thin silver in the sun.

So peaceful, and so little changed! Across the stream the bridge lay broken-backed, but sounds of hammering came up through the thin air, and midget figures moved about with wheelbarrows, repairing it. Among the crushed roofs of Poupehan white scaffolding took the eye. Farther down the valley, where the woods had been stripped, and the Roche des Corneilles showed bare and gray on a bare purple hillside, the young plantations were rising among the brushwood in dotted lines of green. The orchards of the Bellevue, brutally hacked down, had been doctored and replanted, and were whitening with early blossom; and through their branches a quick eye could discern other signs of growth and restoration. Of the original Bellevue not one stone was left upon another, but a new one was rising in its room.

Soon, very soon, the scars would heal, and all would be as it had been.

*And O, how deep the corn
Along the battlefield!*

One change there was, not due to the tide of war. The forlorn wooden cross on the hill-top had gone: had given place to another, a lovely thing in marble, the inspiration of a French artist, standing forty feet high on its pedestal of steps. It had been put up by an English *avion*, presumably to commemorate his miraculous escape from death on that very spot, though the inscription on the plinth did not quite tally with that theory. Strange that a heretic and an Englishman should choose to erect a crucifix, stranger still to those who had known this Englishman before; but times change, and men with them. At any rate there stood the cross; and Rochehaut, if it could not understand, was inordinately proud of it. "Eh, madame, vous allez au Christ, n'est-ce pas?" said Madame Hasquin of the farm to the wife of her temporary lodger. "Ah! c'est beau ça, savex-vous! Mettez une petite prière pour moi, je vous prie!"

So Lettice, sitting on the steps with a pair of masculine socks, as she had once sat on the stones with the green tablecloth, added a prayer for little murdered Denise (which was what Madame meant by her *moi*) to the petition requested by the cross:

D. M. C.

PER ARDUA AD ASTRA
PRIEZ POUR ELLE

THE END

H.C.
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